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2019

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Impact of a Transformative Peer Mentor Model
on Latinx Community College Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Sandy Chávez

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Impact of a Transformative Peer Mentor Model on Latinx Community College Students

by

Sandy Chávez

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Co-Chair

Research shows that 51% of all Latinx in the U.S. who enrolled in all segments of higher education, enrolled in two-year colleges (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). However, Latinx students are less likely to receive a postsecondary degree in comparison to their African-Americans, Asians, and White counterparts (Santiago, 2011). The purpose of this study was to examine how a proposed mentor model known as the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) impacted Latinx peer mentors' and mentees' decision to complete community college. TPMM specifically has four elements: (a) use of counterstorytelling for empowerment, (b) creation of counterspaces by students, (c) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgment of students' Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). The study explored how Latinx students responded to TPMM's elements and how each element worked in conjunction to validate lived-

experiences of Latinx community college students. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study captured the voices of Latinx community college students and contributed to the literature that relates to Latinx mentoring experiences and academic persistence. The study was guided by two research questions: (a) What do peer mentors and mentees identify as the most meaningful components of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model? (b) What forms of Community Cultural Wealth do peer mentors and mentees bring to the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?

Data collection included two focus groups and ten semi-structured interviews with peer mentor-mentee dyads. The qualitative findings depicted the many barriers first-generation college Latinx students encountered throughout their education. Yet, findings suggest that TPMM is a promising approach that supported Latinx community college students' overall educational experience. Further, findings revealed that although students possessed all forms of CCW, the most salient for them are aspirational and familial capital. Findings provide insight for educational leaders on a peer mentor model supports Latinx community college students desire to complete. Findings can help practitioners understand TPMM elements and determine which might be most effective in promoting retention, persistence, college completion, and transfer success at their institution.

The dissertation of Sandy Chávez is approved.

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2019

DEDICATION

Esto se lo dedico a mi Abuelita, Enriqueta Gutiérrez. Usted fue mi primera maestra. Sin su amor, apoyo, y oraciones, esto no hubiera sido posible. ¡Usted es mi inspiración!

Para mis padres, Norma A. Gutiérrez Jaime & Rodolfo Chávez Del Real, sus sacrificios han sido mis enseñanzas y motivación.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This degree has been a community effort and there are many beautiful people I have to thank. First, I need to honor my students—former, current, and future—they continue to be my source of inspiration. My students have taught me more than they will ever know and without them, my life would not have a purpose.

I would like to thank my wonderful committee for believing in TPMM. Dr. Kevin Eagan, Dr. Dimpal Jain, and Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar—I cannot thank you enough for allowing me to work with you. A special thank you to both my co-chairs: Dr. Daniel G. Solórzano, you inspire me to take action and transform our Communities of Color. Dr. Diane Durkin, you saw my model grow into what it is today. I appreciate your constant support and making me a stronger writer.

I honor the *mujeres* who have mentored me. Dra. Vanessa Ochoa—after 17 years, your mentorship continues to impact me in ways that I would have never imagined. You have pushed me to envision a better future for me and my community. Without a doubt, together we are reaching greatness.

To my TEP mentor, Dr. Imelda Landeros-Nava—because of your advocacy I am here today. It was through your research that I realized I had to return to UCLA. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your research. Our work on Latinx in STEM is significant and needed.

To my mentee, Rony Castellanos, thank you for allowing me to be part of your life. You have been a tremendous support during this process. Thank you for providing me the space to grow, for being my sounding board, and making me laugh when I saw no end to this.

To my family, you inspire me every day, but especially my sister, Elizabeth Chávez. I am so proud of you and I cannot wait to see you graduate with your Ed.D.

To my amazing partner, Albert Brizuela. This process has been challenging, but you have been more than understanding. You are patient with me and I cannot ever thank you enough for always taking care of me. Thank you for your unconditional love and pushing me during the times when I doubted myself. You make a me stronger *mujer*. Without you, this wouldn't be possible...mahal kita!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social justice-based mentoring programs aim to increase cultural and social capital, a sense of empowerment, well-being, and self-determination among underrepresented students (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017). This type of intervention may be effective in increasing Latinx student community college completion rates because it integrates academic, emotional and sociocultural support (Crisp et al., 2017). For this project, I developed and implemented a Transformative Peer Mentor Model (also known as TPMM) at a community college with a high population of Latinx¹ students. In this chapter, I state the problem while highlighting some barriers Latinx students encounter as they pursue higher education. Next, I describe how peer mentor programs can be used as interventions, but with specific focus on TPMM. Then, I outline the research questions and research design. I conclude with the significance of this study.

Problem Statement

Latinx people account for roughly 18% of the total U.S. population, and this number is expected to grow rapidly (Pew Research Center, 2017). As the Latinx population continues to grow, higher education institutions throughout the nation have seen an increase in the enrollment of Latinx students (Flink, 2017). California, in particular, has the largest concentration of Latinx people in the nation (Pew Research Center, 2017). More than 50% of all K–12 students are Latinx in California (Solórzano, Acevedo-Gil, & Santos, 2013), and the vast majority of these students will continue their education at a two-year college (Gándara & Cuellar, 2016). Students tend to enroll in community college due to its affordability and accessibility (Dowd, 2003). For

¹ The term Latinx emerged recently as a gender-neutral label for Latino/a and Latin@. The term can disrupt traditional notions of inclusivity and shape institutional understandings of intersectionality (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).

Latinx students, community college traditionally serves as a primary access point to postsecondary education (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Martinez & Fernández, 2004).

Crisp and Nuñez (2014) noted that of all Latinx in the U.S. who enrolled in all segments of higher education, 51% enrolled in two-year colleges. Not surprisingly, in 2016–2017 roughly 43% of all Latinx students in the U.S. enrolled within the California Community Colleges (California Community College Chancellor’s Office [CCCCO] Key Facts). Despite the community college enrollment increase for Latinx, though, community colleges still have the lowest completion² rates compared to all postsecondary institutions (González, 2015). Within the California Community Colleges, the completion rate of degree, certificate and/or transfer-seeking for Latinx students remains at about 36% (CCCCO, 2017). More disturbing is that most students who start at a community college take an average of six years to complete a program either at the starting institution or a different institution (Juszkiewicz, 2016; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014).

The data shows that the community completion rates for Latinx are troubling. It is evident that access to college is not merely the problem for Latinx; rather, the inequities in access to resources, participation, preparation, transfer, and progression (Tovar, 2015). The current demographic shift also suggests that Latinx play a key role in strengthening the U.S. economy. In particular, for Latinx students, obtaining a degree is an open-door to access social and economic stability. Given the low college completion rates, there is an immediate call to improve Latinx postsecondary community college trends and better understand what barriers influence community college completion. The literature underlined environmental and

² The term “completion” will be furthered discussed in Chapter Two.

institutional factors that relate to Latinx student success in higher education (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Tovar, 2015). For instance, environmental factors are classified as external variables that may influence student retention (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012). Whereas, institutional factors are structures within an institution that either support or hinder the success of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in higher education (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). In the next section, I outline various barriers that Latinx confront in higher education.

Latinx Educational Barriers

Community college is the point where the greatest number of Latinx students are lost (Solórzano et al., 2013). Latinx community college students continue to encounter unique educational challenges as they attempt to reach completion. Some educational barriers include: lack of academic preparation, English language proficiency, linguistic and cultural alienation, doubts about their academic abilities, familial financial obligations, and a lack of knowledge of U.S. higher education systems and financial literacy (Flink, 2017; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Torres Campos et al., 2009). Many Latinx students' parents also did not attend college (Flink, 2017). As a result, they often lack access to social and academic capital needed to navigate academic spaces to obtain academic success (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Ward, Thomas, & Disch, 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).

In addition, some Latinx students are placed into developmental education and it becomes difficult for them to advance through the developmental sequence (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015). In fact, in fall 2009 only 36% of Latinx in California who placed in developmental English passed the transfer-level coursework, while roughly 17% who enrolled in developmental math completed transfer-level math coursework within a four-year span (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, & Solórzano, 2014).

Community colleges have a critical role as they impact the lives of Latinx students. Some higher education institutions have responded to the educational needs of Latinx students with the implementation of mentor programs. Considerable research has been devoted to this approach (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Crisp, 2010; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Salas, Aragon, Alandejani, & Timpson, 2014; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). However, there is a dearth of data on how mentoring programs actually help students at the community college level (Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Peer Mentor Programs as Interventions

Peer mentoring is defined as a more experienced student helping a less experienced student to improve on overall academic performance while mentors gain personal growth and mentees receive advice, support, and knowledge (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). In this study, I will use Rios et al.'s (2015) definition of peer mentoring—mentees receive guidance from high-achieving peers who have similar experiences and know how to navigate the educational barriers to achieve academic success (p. 37). Peer mentors can provide their mentees with important information about college courses, financial aid, and the transfer and admissions process (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Latinx students who reported feeling mentored also reported feeling better adjusted to college life (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005).

Simultaneously, peer mentoring is an opportunity for the development and practice of leadership ability, resourcefulness, and character for the actual mentor (Ward et al., 2014). For peer mentors, such programs are important because they provide the opportunity to create Student of Color leaders within the community college sector due to the positive relationship between leadership capacity and peer mentoring (Dugan & Komives, 2010). For instance, peer

mentors may not only develop a greater sense of purpose, but also gain a sense of responsibility because they are role models who have a positive impact on their mentees' lives (Martinez, Everman, & Haber-Curran, 2017). There is also urgency to examine how mentoring has the ability to support the peer mentors' own retention and academic success. In fact, little research has explored community college mentoring programs or the impact of the mentoring relationship on the actual mentor (Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Haber-Curran, Everman, & Martinez, 2017; Harmon, 2006; Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, & Wilss, 2008; Pfund, Byars-Winston, Branchaw, Hurtado, & Eagan, 2016). This study attempts to fill that additional gap in the research.

Understanding how a peer mentor program affects Latinx students is important because while they enroll in community college at high rates; they still have low college completion rates. Further, as the Latinx population continues to grow, few efforts have been dedicated to recognize the potential cultural assets and resilience that Latinx communities and students bring to the academic world (Campa, 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Mentoring has known benefits, but the mentoring experiences of Latinx students reveal unique barriers, including not feeling a sense of belonging, being low-income, and being academically unprepared (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

Peer mentoring may be a viable means to support Latinx students because it can promote their academic success while recognizing their values and resilience (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Rios-Ellis et al. 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). For example, peer mentoring programs can match Latinx students with similar contextual experiences whose first-hand experience allows them to understand the educational barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve academic success (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). More importantly, findings indicate

that mentoring may have a positive impact on the degree and career aspirations, academic achievement, college adjustment, and transfer success of Latinx students (Crisp & Cruz, 2010; Moschetti, Plunkett, Efrat, & Yomtov, 2017).

This study focused on the experiences of Latinx community college students who participated in a First-Year Experience (FYE) and overcame unique barriers. Therefore, it was imperative to match FYE students with peer mentors who had already navigated their first year of community college successfully and learned to negotiate their identity within academia. Since the majority of students leave college within their first year, most research has focused on retention during this time (Barefoot, 2000; Bers & Younger, 2014; Tinto, 1987). Further, the first year of college is critical to student success because it will impact the entire undergraduate experience (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1999) suggested that students should experience some type of shared learning during their first year of college in order to promote student persistence.

Many California Community Colleges are using FYE programs to address retention, persistence, and transfer rates for Latinx first-year students (Knight, 2003). In this study, the peer mentees participated in a FYE program at Queta College while the peer mentors were upperclassmen enrolled at the same community college. Queta's FYE program utilized a holistic educational approach to support academic success and a sense of belonging for academically and demographically diverse student populations as they prepared to transition to a four-year institution. FYE focused on creating a community of learners to facilitate a sense of belonging in the college environment. The primary objective of FYE is to support students as they develop their self-advocacy skills and college-going mindset.

This Project: Transformative Peer Mentor Model

In this study, I examined a unique social justice peer mentor model within FYE, with a specific focus on Latinx community college students. I classified both peer mentors and their mentees as first-generation, low-income Students of Color who might be perceived as *at-risk*³ college students. Although research has shown the positive impact of peer mentor programs on improving college student outcomes (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Sorrentino, 2007; Ward et al., 2014), few studies have investigated how these programs help students at the community college level (Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Schueths & Carranza, 2012).

I developed and implemented the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM), which embedded critical research findings, such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). TPMM also combined elements of social justice pedagogy and leadership development. TPMM's core components: (a) included counterstorytelling as a tool to reframe Latinx students' educational experiences from deficit to that of empowerment, (b) made it possible for Latinx students to create counterspaces, (c) engaged in Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring practice, and (d) acknowledged students' CCW. TPMM is critical at community colleges because it serves students from diverse populations and non-traditional backgrounds. This type of intervention is effective in increasing Latinx student community college completion rates because it integrates academic, emotional and sociocultural support (Crisp et al., 2017). TPMM is unique because I developed this model for community colleges with a population of

³ The term *at-risk* describes students who have a greater probability for academic failure due to adverse circumstances (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). In Chapter Two, I will explain how labels, such as *at-risk student*, place blame on the student and are deemed as deficit language.

Latinx students, specifically Latinx peer mentor and peer mentee students attending a California community college.

Most retention research on Students of Color has been conducted at four-year universities, which assumes that the student experience at community colleges is identical to the four-year student experience (Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Nora, 2010). This study also recognized the barriers and challenges Latinx students encounter as they pursue academic success. Educational institutions tend to work around a deficit perspective because they assume that Students of Color do not have the social and cultural capital required for social mobility (Yosso, 2006). However, TPMM challenged the deficit-thinking model and acknowledged that community colleges have different demographics, structures, student needs, and institutional culture. TPMM's training employed the framework and lens of CRT to explore the transformative peer mentor and help explain how community college Latinx students make sense of the role of race and racism in their lived experiences.

TPMM also challenged the deficit narrative by recognizing and building on Latinx students' Community Cultural Wealth and acknowledged the resources they brought to the educational process (Yosso, 2006). A unique aspect of this study is that TPMM taught peer mentors with a key framework: (a) critical social justice programming, (b) leadership development, and (c) transformative reflective practice. In particular, TPMM training allowed student peer mentors to create an academic and social counterspace and develop (or enhance) skills to critically navigate the academic and home environments (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). Student peer mentors critically identified and challenged their educational obstacles by applying counterstorytelling as a strategy to "reactivate the personal and community assets" (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015, p. 27) in an effort to achieve completion. Solórzano and

Yosso (2002) defined counterstorytelling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 26). Student peer mentors developed their own critical consciousness with the intent to analyze historical contexts and critique current inequities in the PK-16 educational pipeline, including Queta College. Student peer mentors also learned about institutional and environmental barriers and how these might have impacted their K-12 and college academic performance. In this manner, student peer mentors began to develop a critique of social oppression in the hopes they grow a desire for social justice and change. Moreover, TPMM’s goal was to have student peer mentors share the knowledge and resources learned in training with their paired mentees.

The project involved designing and implementing a peer mentor model using Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth as its frame with the goal of recognizing and activating students’ CCW while validating their unique lived-experiences as they complete community college. I identified which key elements of TPMM supported Latinx students as they advance towards community college completion. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Questions

1. What do peer mentors and mentees identify as the most meaningful components of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?
2. What forms of Community Cultural Wealth do peer mentors and mentees bring to the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative study to identify what changes occur for peer mentors and mentees during their participation in the TPMM for one academic year. TPMM training offered peer mentors critical social justice programming to support their mentoring relationships. The

peer mentors came from diverse majors, educational goals, and class levels. The study's participants were composed of a student sample who meet the criteria to participate in TPMM. TPPM recruited Queta students for the peer mentor position who had a minimum 2.5 grade point average (GPA), enrolled either full-time or part-time, and were available to attend all TPMM-related activity. Additionally, student peer mentors demonstrated an interest in helping others and had completed their first year of college successfully. It is important to note that the peer mentor position was a volunteer opportunity.

Student peer mentees were enrolled in the FYE program and demonstrated a need for mentoring. First, I coordinated two focus groups that included students from the general TPMM pool. The peer mentor focus group had seven participants. Whereas, the mentee focus group had five participants. Focus groups were conducted prior to the semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to refine my interview protocols. The focus groups were facilitated by Queta College staff. After the focus groups were conducted, I recruited five (5) peer mentor-mentee dyads for a total of 10 participants. These students were interviewed separately and were not part of the focus groups. Data collection strategies for my research that helped me triangulate the data included: two focus groups and five semi-structured interviews that were written evidence relating to educational aspirations. I then coded focus groups and semi-structured interviews for underlying themes.

Public Engagement and Research Significance

The literature revealed that Latinx students have the lowest postsecondary completion rates and my research findings are useful for community college leaders interested in developing effective peer mentor programs for this student population who has specific needs. This research illuminates the rationale behind utilizing TPMM that identified specific mentoring activities that

are most effective for Latinx community college students to increase academic achievement. I also fill that additional gap in the existing research on Latinx college students who served as peer mentors and highlight their lived-experiences by examining how their involvement positively impacted their own social and academic development, retention, and college completion. Acknowledging and learning from lived-experiences of students who are enrolled in community college and are thriving is important for policy and program development, as well as future research. I describe this further in Chapter Five.

The research findings are shared with the Queta College community, which includes faculty, staff, administrators, and students. An open forum allows for conversations regarding the elements of TPMM that worked effectively and which might need improvement. In addition, the findings will be presented at various conferences, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience (FYE), National Mentoring Summit, and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Presenting in various public engagements will allow me to introduce the Transformative Peer Mentor Model and outline recommendations for other sites that are looking to address the community college completion crisis⁴.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first defined the Latinx community college completion crisis as they pursue higher education. Chapter One also stated how mentoring programs can be an effective intervention at two-year institutions while describing the elements of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model. The following chapter outlines the relevant literature that discusses the multiple

⁴ With adaptation, the TPMM can be replicated to serve diverse student populations in various higher education settings.

barriers Latinx confront in higher education, as well as the effective strategies, such as the Puente Program, currently implemented in community colleges. In addition, I review the need for peer mentor programs that specifically support Latinx community college students. It is evident in the literature review that there is a lack of information on mentor models at community colleges that serve Latinx students' needs and experiences. There is also limited research on how peer mentor programs impact the actual mentor's educational goals. Lastly, Chapter Two presents the theoretical frameworks that guided this study. Chapter Three presents my methodology, which was drawn from focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Chapter Three also provides the analysis methods, issues of credibility, and ethical concerns. Chapter Four describes the findings whereas Chapter Five discusses how the literature support the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, Latinx people are currently the largest ethnic-minority group (Berbery & O'Brien, 2018; Flink, 2017; Krogstad, 2016; Salas et al., 2014; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). As a result, they are also the largest minority group seeking higher education (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Fry & Taylor, 2013). Although college enrollment rates have increased substantially, Latinx completion rates have not. As a result, some higher education institutions have responded to the educational needs of Latinx students with the implementation of peer mentor programs. However, the majority of existing peer mentor literature highlights programs that are implemented at four-year universities (Crisp et al., 2017), which have different structures, student needs, and institutional cultures than two-year colleges. This study examined the extent to which a new Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) impacted Latinx community college students, who are peer mentors and mentees, with the intention to complete their educational goals.

In this chapter, I first provided an in-depth review of completion trends pertaining to Latinx students. Second, I outlined the institutional and environmental barriers that Latinx students encounter in higher education. Third, I reviewed the existing literature that examines student-support services; such as First-Year Experience (FYE) and the Puente Project that target first-year students. I then turn to how students, mentees and mentors, benefit from the mentor experience. I also highlight programs that have effectively supported Latinx college students. Finally, I present the theoretical frameworks that guide this research.

Latinx Higher Education Crisis

Higher education institutions have been unsuccessful in retaining and graduating Latinx students (Moschetti et al., 2017). In 2014, Latinx college enrollment in two and four-year colleges increased to 35% compared to 22% in 1993, for those ages 18 to 24 (McFarland et al., 2017). It is evident that For Latinx students, the issue is not college access; rather, the challenge is academic success in college and degree completion. In reality, 28% of Latinx, ages 25 to 29, attained an associate's degree and 19% obtained a bachelor's degree or higher while their White counterparts reached 54% and 42%, respectively (McFarland et al., 2017).

To illustrate greater concern, Latinx students are disproportionately enrolled in community college. Crisp and Nora (2010) noted that in the U.S., 58% of Latinx enroll in a two-year college compared to 42% of White students. More shocking, though, is that students who start at a community college take an average of six years to complete a program either at the starting institution or a different institution (González, 2015; Juskiewicz, 2016; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). In fact, a national longitudinal study that examined six-year attainment and persistence rates for community college students, revealed that 53% of Latinx had left college and, as a result, did not complete a college credential (Tovar, 2015).

The vision of the 1960 California Master Plan for Education intended to provide every student an opportunity to attain a quality post-secondary education (Mosqueda, 2010). The Master Plan has three tiers of higher education systems in California: (a) UCs are primarily research-driven institutions, (b) CSUs produce undergraduate and master's degrees, including professional and teacher education; and (c) community colleges are considered open-access campuses that offer lower division courses along with developmental instruction, ESL courses, adult non-credit instruction, community service courses, and workforce readiness (University of

California, 2002). Particularly, the California Community Colleges (CCC) is the largest system of higher education in the nation with 114 institutions across California with a total of 2.1 million students (California Community College Chancellor's Office [CCCCO]).

The CCCCCO reported that in 2016 to 2017, Latinx students were the largest ethnic subgroup, comprising 44% of the total student population Yet, Latinx students are the least likely to advance to completion if they do not reach the 30-credit milestone (Moore & Shulock, 2010). In fact, the Foundation for CCC (2019) reports that in the most recent cohort from 2011-2012, 41% of Latinx students do not complete a certificate, degree, or transfer after six years of initially enrolling compared to 65% Asian and 54% White counterparts. To further illustrate concern, the CCC most recent Student Success Scorecard shows that 36% of Latinx first-time students, who began in 2011–12, completed a degree, certificate or transfer to a four-year university within six years (CCCCO, 2017) at the study research site—Queta College.

The CCC system outcomes are reported over six years to include the large majority of students who have part-time enrollment status (CCCCO, 2017). However, Contreras and Contreras (2015) described the Scorecard Metric developed by the California Community College Chancellor's office as followed: (a) Persistence Rate—student who has been enrolled for three consecutive terms, (b) 30 Units Rate—student who earned 30 units, and (c) Completion—Student Progress and Attainment Rate (SPAR), which is a six-year cohort completion rate for students who either transferred to a four-year or completed a two-year degree. The authors disputed that the six-year completion analysis of Southern California community college rates is problematic because it does not separate student outcomes into degree completion and transfer (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). It is critical to understand how many students are completing their degrees at a two-year college and in which field versus actually transferring to a four-year

institution (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Further, González and Ballysingh (2012) stated that by disaggregating data sets, colleges are able to identify any gaps in Latinx achievement with regard to term-to-term and year-to-year persistence, successful completion of developmental education, successful completion of gatekeeper courses (e.g., math), and successful completion of a degree, certificate, or transfer (p. 287).

The CCCCCO reported that in 2016–2017 Latinx had the highest enrollment status averaging 44%. Yet, Latinx students are the least likely to advance to completion if they do not reach the 30-credit milestone (Moore & Shulock, 2010). More attention has been given to completion in the community college system as the measure of success rather than access (Bragg & Durham, 2012). Community colleges have a critical function in alleviating the completion crisis, but are often questioned for not producing stronger outcomes, especially for minority students (Levin, Cox, Cerven, & Haberler, 2010). The following section examined the institutional and environmental factors that contribute to the lack of completion rates amongst Latinx students.

Latinx Educational Barriers

For Latinx, community colleges are a starting point toward a path of access and equity in higher education. Furthermore, community college completion for Latinx is critical to the U.S. economic competitiveness. Failure to achieve the goal of properly serving Latinx students may be seen as an economic problem. Excelencia in Education (2014) predicted that to stay globally competitive, Latinx will need to earn 5.5 million more degrees in higher education by 2020. Latinx students do have aspirations to complete their educational goals. Most Latinx students who enroll in community college intend to transfer to a four-year institution (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Arbona & Nora, 2007; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Martinez & Fernández, 2004; Solórzano et al.,

2005; Tovar, 2015). Crisp and Nora (2010) stated that 80% of Latinx community college students have the intention of transferring, but less than 25% actually meet their educational goal.

Researchers have outlined several variables that impact Latinx students' academic success, such as academic preparedness and family responsibilities (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Berbery & O'Brien, 2017; Contreras, 2005; González, 2015; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Further, students from low-income families, of Latinx background, and classified as first-generation college students are substantially less likely to be academically prepared and have the financial resources required to enroll in college (Perna & Jones, 2013). Although current educational and policy objectives are focused on increasing Latinx degree completion, there is a misalignment with understanding the experiences of Latinx that could help redefine pedagogical and institutional practices (Cavazos, 2016). In this section, I review the larger overlapping institutional and environmental conditions that influence Latinx students' completion.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional factors are structures within an institution that either support or yield the success of underrepresented minorities (URMs) in higher education (Crips & Nuñez, 2014). Below is an introduction to institutional barriers that have been proposed by researchers.

Structural factors. Latinx students must resist racism and deficit stigmas throughout the educational system (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006). For example, school segregation continues to be persistent and students with different linguistic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds usually attend schools that are poorly resourced public schools (Condrón, 2009; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012). Poverty has a direct effect and impact on minority students. A disproportionate number of Latinx students live in low-income

neighborhoods (Schueths & Carranza, 2012) and will attend schools that have overcrowding, few educational resources, poor physical conditions, and teachers with lower levels of experience and certification (Condrón, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006). These schools seldom offer college preparatory curriculum (González, 2015). As a result, Latinx students begin college with lower levels of “college readiness” (Contreras, 2005; González, 2015).

Lack of academic preparedness. One result from attending underserved K-12 schools is that most Latinx students are not academically prepared and are more likely to be placed in developmental, also known as remedial coursework. Community college students’ assessment scores determine college-level or development coursework (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2013). The intention is that when students place in developmental coursework they will accelerate through the sequence in a timely manner to advance toward certificates, associate’s degree, or transfer (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Crisp & Delgado, 2014). However, developmental coursework is usually not intended toward a degree or certificate; rather, the courses are designed to increase academic skill (Crisp & Delgado, 2014). Research has showed that enrollment in developmental coursework is negatively correlated with persistence and degree completion amongst community college Latinx students (Alfonso, 2006; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Fike & Fike, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2005).

There is a misalignment between K-12 and postsecondary education and, as a result, students and parents receive mixed messages about how and what students need to enter and be successful in college (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Students are not aware of the placements exams and do not prepare appropriately (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). In 2012, about 85% of all CCC students assessed below transfer-level math and 72% scored below transfer-level English. (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2013). Latinx are far more likely than their White or

Asian counterparts to be placed in developmental courses (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015), are overrepresented in the lowest levels of the sequence (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), and less likely to enroll in college-level course (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012).

For example, in California out of 100 Latinx students who assessed into developmental English or math, only 34 and 14, respectively, will advance to a transfer-level course in a three-year period (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). These “gatekeepers” courses become hidden hurdles in the completion process, and many students are discouraged from enrolling in them or not completing the sequence (Bailey, 2009). In particular, Latinx are more likely to leave college before earning a degree (Lamont Strayhorn, 2008). However, a contrasting study by Crisp and Delgado (2014) suggests that developmental education has no direct impact on persistence and may instead decrease students’ opportunities to transfer. It is important to better understand the role of developmental education in promoting success among Latinx students, which includes the interaction students have with faculty and staff.

Interactions with faculty and staff. Research has identified the impact of faculty and staff interactions on Latinx community college student achievement. For example, Tovar (2015) observes that quality of interactions with instructors and counselors did in fact have an influence on community college Latinx students’ success and intent towards degree completion. Research highlights that the more interactions the student has with instructional faculty, the more positive impact it had on grade point average (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014; Torres Campos et al., 2009; Tovar, 2015) and adjustment to college (Hurtado et al., 1996). For community college students, student-faculty interactions are opportunities that allow students to receive important information and also increase their college transition (Deil-Amen, 2011; Cejda & Hoover, 2010; Oseguera et al., 2009).

Findings also emphasize the positive effect on student retention with Latinx faculty and administration presence on campus (Hernandez, 2000; Oseguera et al., 2009; Solórzano, 1998). Oseguera et al. (2009) note that Latinx faculty and administration not only are role models to students who might doubt their potential to succeed in college, but also serve as a cultural liaison and source of validation. Gonzales, Brammer, and Sawilowsky (2015) explain that Latinx faculty who utilized a culturally reflective curriculum, while communicating high expectations and employing high-impact practices create an intentional Latinx-centered learning community, which results in lasting bonds and *familismo* (familism). *Familismo* is defined as a Latino cultural value that emphasizes family loyalty, unity, obligation, and obedience (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2015).

Institutions that foster *familismo* can help reduce the pressures of assimilation and rather be a source of inspiration during times of adversity, contribute to academic motivation and self-esteem (Gonzales et al., 2015) all while finding a Latinx community on campus (Iloh, 2017). However, the number of faculty of color and administrators in academia is relatively low (Cavazos, 2016; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). This faculty shortage also creates a lack of Latinx faculty mentorship for Latinx students (Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Although Latinx students benefit from interactions with faculty and staff, some faculty may implement deficit-thinking practices. Deficit thinking conveys that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance (Yosso, 2006, p. 75). Yosso (2006) states that often educators assume that schools work and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to the effective and equitable system.

Deficit-thinking practices are institutional barriers. It corresponds with faculty resistance to advising students and having low expectations for student academic success (Martinez &

Fernández, 2004). Latinx students are often seen as unteachable, lazy, or illiterate. Rhoads (1999) examines how the majority of faculty and administrations' pedagogical practices, at a community college with majority Latinx student population, were aligned with monoculturalism, which is the belief that a singular culture prevails or ought to prevail within society (p. 115). Students may internalize these negative beliefs, which become self-defeating (Lamont Strayhorn, 2008; Steele, 1997). Faculty, staff and administrators should understand the experiences of Latinx students, including their cultural contexts, because these interactions can facilitate students' sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is the social support that students perceive on campus; it is a feeling of connection, and that the student matters (Lamont Strayhorn, 2008). Hurtado and Alvarado (2015) stated that the academic success of students attending four-year, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) was impacted by key relationships: between the racial composition of an institution, the campus racial climate, and students' perception of the campus as hostile or welcoming. Perceptions of a hostile campus, racial climate, (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011) or feelings of marginality lower Latinx students' sense of belonging and persistence (Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Sanchez, 2017).

For example, racial microaggressions severely impact Latinx students' sense of belonging by making them feel unwelcome. Microaggressions include actions that create alienation such as, lowered expectations and racially assaultive remarks (Yosso et al., 2009). Such aggressions make students feel uncomfortable and invisible on campus because it suggests that they have no place in the collegiate space (Sanchez, 2017). In addition, Latinx students "must transcend many obstacles as raced, classed, sexed, and linguicized people" (Campa, 2010,

p. 430). As a result, many Latinx students begin to fall behind in their coursework, stop attending classes, and eventually are *pushed out*⁵ (Campa, 2010).

Microaggressions may be intentionally or unconsciously delivered via verbal or visual insults, and often take the form of subtle jokes that are racially charged; these insults question students' ability and belonging (Sanchez, 2017; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). To resist microaggressions and underlying racism, Latinx students often create academic and social counterspaces where they build a culturally supportive and affirming community. Sanchez (2017) provided examples, which include: being able to speak Spanish on campus without retaliation and creating Latinx cultural events or organizations that are visible on campus. A sense of belonging has been closely tied to persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, many Latinx students feel the need to assimilate to the dominant culture to fit in the institution (Johnson et al., 2007). For Latinx students, ties to family and support systems are important to college adjustment, especially in their first year (Hurtado et al., 1996). The search for support indicates that institutions should consider learning and understanding the importance of family in order for Latinx students to succeed.

Environmental Barriers

Environmental factors are any external variables that may influence student retention (Nakajima et al., 2012). Research has identified various barriers, which are summarized in-depth in the next section.

Family responsibility. Despite deficit views on Latinx students and parents' educational values, Latinx students report that family support is the key reason for the college adjustment in

⁵ This dissertation reframes deficit language. The concept of drop-out does not account the many obstacles and educational inequities that Students of Color continuously confront.

the first year (Hernandez, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1996), but also their persistence to remain academically motivated (Nakajima et al., 2012). *Familismo* is important in Latinx culture and it is associated with higher levels of family loyalty and obligation (Stein et al., 2015). As a result, Latinx students tend to prioritize family obligations over studying (Phinney, Torres Campos, Padilla Kallemeyn, & Kim, 2011). Crisp and Nora (2010) find that Latinx students' socioeconomic circumstances requires them to work long hours, which impacts their social participation in college. Students who have multiple family responsibilities lack time on campus to participate in academic and social activities, and are also more likely to drop out at the end of their first year in college (Nora & Crisp, 2009). African American and Latinx college students perform better in college when family members are willing to help financially, share household responsibilities, and provide moral support and encouragement (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). *Familismo* can be a motivational factor, but simultaneously, an obstacle in Latinx students' ability to complete community college, especially if students feel the pressure to contribute financially.

Financial responsibility. Latinx students typically come from lower socioeconomic levels compared to other ethnic groups and, consequently, have greater financial need (Phinney et al., 2011). Hagedorn and Cepeda (2004) state that Latinx students are more likely to be employed full time and less likely to take out academic loans. Community college Latinx students who must work jeopardize their school performance (Trillo, 2004), interactions with college peers and personnel (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015), and participation in campus activities (Crisp, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2009). Since many Latinx students are the first in their family to attend college (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004), their parents lack the college knowledge, such as the financial mechanisms, to properly navigate the college environment. Also, Latinx students may

not have direct access to resources needed to navigate the academic setting. Thus, their educational endeavors are delayed (Crisp, 2010; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Phinney et al., 2011; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006).

Latinx students often lack guidance or information and automatically assume that they do not qualify for financial aid (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Cost of tuition and books are stressors for many Latinx students and a sense of relief is associated with the opportunity to receive financial assistance (Nora & Crisp, 2009). Financial aid policies that subsidized tuition rates are a key factor that enable Latinx students to achieve completion (Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013). Often, Latinx students' financial responsibilities affects their enrollment status. Since first-generation, Students of Color tend to work more hours, their enrollment status indicates the added semesters they will need to complete their educational goal (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Dennis et al., 2005). Further, undocumented students are often discouraged to complete college because even with in-state tuition policies, many still cannot afford college altogether (Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015).

Enrollment status. Contreras and Contreras (2015) identify a key pattern in Latinx enrollment status—they are more likely to enroll in college as part-time students while managing a 20-hour work schedule, which influenced a prolonged completion and a likelihood of early college departure. Full-time students generally are not only more likely to attend, but actually persist when compared to part-time students (Crisp & Nora, 2010). They also demonstrate institutional commitment (Bers & Younger, 2014; Crisp & Nora, 2010). Although students make special arrangements with employers to effectively manage their school schedule, often they find themselves sacrificing their time, health, and family obligations (Zell, 2010). However, Alfonso

(2006) suggests that if Latinx students enroll in at least nine units per semester, they are 35% more likely to complete a degree.

Despite institutional and environmental barriers, most Latinx students have learned to strategize various resources and supports that allows them navigate the community college system. One viable strategy for Latinx students to further promote their persistence is through participation in programs that fosters motivation and promote persistence.

Current Strategies to Increase Community College Completion

While multiple factors impact Latinx students' college completion, higher education systems have implemented various student-support services as interventions. Two examples of such services are the First-Year Experience (FYE) and the Puente Project, which helps students complete their first year at community college. Most research has focused on retention over the first year because the majority of students leave college during this crucial time period (Barefoot, 2000; Bers & Younger, 2014; Tinto, 1987). The following section introduces the components of FYE and Puente programs.

Puente and FYE programs share many similarities. For example, FYE programs focus on providing skills, support, and knowledge that are critical for students to survive the various challenges of the first year in college (Fike & Fike, 2008; Hunter, 2006; Permzadian & Credé, 2016). Alike, Puente offers academic, counseling, and mentoring supports for students to build the necessary skills to succeed academically and professionally while in community college (Puente Project, 2018). FYE also offers cohort-based instruction with curriculum developed around a central theme (Hunter, 2006), while Puente uses a cultural framework (Gándara & Moreno, 2002; Laden, 1999). Both programs implement faculty perspective as they work to develop the curriculum and provide a theme-based learning experience (Howard & Flora, 2015;

Hunter, 2006; Laden, 1999; Mosqueda, 2010). In the following section, I will explain the benefits of FYE and the Puente Project with particular emphasis on their unique offerings.

First-Year Experience

FYE programs began in the early 1960s and its goal was to increase access to higher education for first-generation students (Mosqueda, 2010). Although FYE programs are implemented in both two-year and four-year institutions, research and funding to encourage and support FYE programs launched later at community colleges (Bers & Younger, 2014). FYE programs target first-generation, low-income students with the goal of increasing social development retention, persistence, and degree completion (Goodman, 2006; Knight, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). FYE programs strengthen the connection to the university to introduce new students to campus life while providing supports within and outside the classroom. Although FYE programs are different at each institution there are key services commonly associated with FYE, such as: credit-bearing first-year seminars, orientation, academic advising, and learning communities (Bers & Younger, 2014).

Learning communities. FYE programs with learning communities support community college student success, involvement, and retention (Bers & Younger, 2014; Karp, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Students who participate in structured programs perform stronger when they are offered clear and defined options that are prescribed paths to completion (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Learning communities help students become a community (Tinto, 1997), which increases academic achievement (Knight, 2003). Learning communities are small academic communities with student cohorts who enter college for the first time who often take

courses together (Sanchez, 2012; Tinto, 1997). Often, these learning communities are organized through course cluster, orientation seminars, and coordinated studies (Knight, 2003).

For example, FYE enrolls 25 students in a learning community in which students take English (generally a developmental course) paired with a general education course required for graduation (Mosqueda, 2010). As a result, when students are placed in learning communities, they often persist beyond their first semester, acclimate to the campus academic and social culture, and have quality interactions with faculty and staff (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Mosqueda, 2010; Person, Rosenbaum, & Deil-Amen, 2006; Sanchez, 2012; Tinto, 1997). Overall, students who participate in first-year seminars are more likely to have confident perceptions of themselves as learners (Goodman, 2006).

Research has emphasized the importance of including peer mentors in first-year seminars as a liaison between students and faculty (Chester, Burton, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013; Jamelske, 2009; Light, 2001). Peer mentors may be more effective because they are perceived as less threatening and more approachable than mentors with more stature or authority, such as faculty or staff (Haber-Curran et al., 2017; Light, 2001). However, within FYE programs, peer mentoring is not a common offering and some programs embed peer mentors as an additional resource (Jamelske, 2009).

Puente Project

The Puente Project inaugurated in Northern California in the early 1980s to increase Latinx community college student transfer rates (Rendón, 2002) and with the intention that they will return to their communities as leaders and mentors (Laden, 1999). Patricia McGrath, English faculty, and Felix Galaviz, counselor and assistant dean, inaugurated Puente with the vision of building a *puente* (bridge) between two-year and four-year colleges and with the greater

community (Laden, 1999). In the last 30 years, Puente has become a nationally award-winning program (Laden, 1999). To further showcase Puente's success, during the 2009-2010 academic year, Puente transfer rates from community to four-year colleges was 56% compared with 44% in all California community colleges (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). Puente recognizes the cultural attributes of Latinx students by encompassing an interdisciplinary approach with curriculum, counseling, and mentoring (Laden, 1999).

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Puente's cultural approach welcomes students to an academic setting that is engaging and builds on their cultural strengths, which in turn, motivates them to succeed (Laden, 1999; Murphy & Murphy, 2018). For example, the English courses are culturally engaging because the reading material reflects Latinx students' cultural experiences and identity while fostering a "family" learning environment (Laden, 1999; McGrath & Galaviz, 1996; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Rendón, 2002). Puente faculty undergo an intensive summer training where they interact in similar learning activities as Puente students and at least one faculty is Latinx (Laden, 1999). Alongside, academic counselors interact consistently with Puente students and provide motivation and psychological support to ensure college persistence (Laden, 1999). Rendón (2002) has done research on the Puente Project and the positive impact the concept of validation it had on community students' academic and personal growth. Rendón (2002) has found that Puente students gained confidence in their academic ability and learned to transfer their skillsets to non-Puente courses. The following section outlines how mentoring programs are a viable means to retain students.

Mentoring. A key offering of the Puente project is the mentoring service that relies heavily on professional Latinx volunteers who commit to work with their assigned Puente mentee for one academic year (Laden, 1999). Puente mentors are formally trained, carefully

matched with Puente mentees, and attend academic and social activities with their mentees, such as visits to four-year universities and mentors' work sites (Laden, 1999). The Puente mentor serves as a cultural role model as they share and demonstrate how they maintain their cultural identities while successfully pursuing their career goals (Laden, 1999).

Puente mentors are also responsible to engage Puente students in academic and interpersonal validation since they are incorporated into the classwork, and help to build a sense of *familia* (McGrath & Galaviz, 1996; Rendón, 2002). Puente mentors affirm their mentees, stress the importance of receiving a degree and giving back to their communities (Rendón, 2002). Puente Project's holistic approach with a validating team of faculty, counselors, and mentors who together promote college access and success (Rendón, 2002). Puente is a successful example of a collaborative student-support program designed to affirm Latinx students while helping them complete community college (Laden, 1999; McGrath & Galaviz, 1996; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Rendón, 2002). The following section outlines how participation in mentoring programs, for both peer mentors and mentees, is beneficial.

Mentoring as a Retention Effort

Mentoring has been correlated to positive student outcomes, which includes grade point average (GPA), social acclimation, and decisions to persist in college (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Chester et al., 2013; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Hurtado et al., 1996; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schabmann, Spiel, & Carbon, 2011; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). More recently, various higher education systems have implemented mentor programs in an effort to increase student retention (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp & Nora, 2009; Jacobi, 1991; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Ward et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that peer mentoring specifically in higher education is fairly new and research into its

potential benefits is still limited (Crisp & Cruz 2009). This is in part due to the different operational definitions of mentoring (Budge, 2006; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991).

As previously stated, in this study, Rios et al. (2015) definition of peer mentoring is used—mentees receive guidance from high-achieving peers who have similar experiences and know how to navigate the educational barriers to achieve academic success (p. 37). In this study, peer mentors supported first-year students. Peer mentors are more likely to be experiencing similar challenges as their peer mentees and may be well-matched to provide relevant advice and strategies regarding academics and the college structure (Collier, 2017). In fact, one of the central components of mentoring is the reciprocity that is exchanged between mentee and mentor, which is opposite of a one-way relationship (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012). Research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of mentoring, and below I highlight the impact it has on mentees, specifically for the first-year student and mentors alike.

Benefits for Mentees

There are known mentoring benefits for the peer mentee. Some of the benefits for first-year students include preventing the negative effects of stress and improved retention (Jacobi, 1991). For first-year college students, mentoring is detrimental to their academic success since the greatest rate of student attrition occurs in that first year (Heirdsfield et al., 2008). Jacobi (1991) points out During their first year of college, students have to balance academic and social activities, create new social networks, and adapt to the college culture (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Some students do not adjust to the college life, which could push them to exit college (Leidenfrost et al., 2011). Peer mentors can provide students with important information about college courses, financial aid, and the admissions process (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). First-year students who engage in mentoring programs are more likely to show a stronger academic

performance that compared to a similar cohort of non-mentored students (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Fox, Stevenson, Connelly, Duff, & Dunlop, 2010).

For Latinx students, mentoring provides emotional support, which is reflected in being listened to, encouragement, moral support, and being able to discuss academic success with their mentor (Treviño, Hite, Hallam, & Ferrin 2014). Peer mentors can provide students with important information about college courses, financial aid, and the admissions process (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Further, research has found that mentorship has been one relevant strategy to promote students' feelings sense of belonging to the college environment (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017; Chester et al., 2013). In particular, for Latinx college students, a social support network plays an important role in their decision to persistence (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). For example, Latinx mentored students feel validated and a sense of community, which ease feelings of not belonging and supports persistence (Salas, et al., 2014). In the sub-section, I identified benefits for peer mentors.

Benefits for Mentors

Peer mentoring seems to encourage higher retention for mentors through increased academic and social integration. Further, peer mentoring is an opportunity for the development and practice of leadership ability, resourcefulness, and character for the mentor (Ward et al., 2014). For the peer mentors, such programs are important because they provide the opportunity to create Student of Color leaders within the community college sector, given the positive relationship between leadership capacity and peer mentoring (Dugan & Komives, 2010). For instance, peer mentors may not only develop a greater sense of purpose, but also gain a sense of responsibility because they are role models who have a positive impact on the mentees' lives (Martinez et al., 2017). Stanton-Salazar (2011) referred to mentors as “institutional agents”

because they directly provide resources to racial minority youth, who have the capability to empower students, help them transform themselves, their communities, and society as a whole. Furthermore, mentors also learn about campus resources, and develop skillsets that are necessary for their personal and professional growth (Beltman & Schaeben, 2012).

However, there is urgency to examine how mentoring has the ability to also support the peer mentors' own retention and academic success. In fact, little research has explored community college mentoring programs or the impact of the mentoring relationship on mentors (Good et al., 2000). Much less research has been devoted to the mentoring experiences of Latinx students. The following section explores how mentoring has an effect on Latinx student success. Moreover, special attention is given to mentor model that have demonstrated effectiveness in Latinx college persistence, retention, and completion.

Effective Peer Mentor Models in Higher Education for Latinx Students

Research has shown that mentoring may be a viable means of supporting Latinx students because it can promote their academic success (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Rios-Ellis et al. 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Mentoring programs enhance Latinx students' access to social networks, which allow students to gain the social capital and access to crucial educational resources, needed to succeed in college and increase the probability for completion (Tovar, 2015). In particular, Rios et al. (2015) noted that peer mentorship programs can provide a pathway for underserved Latinx students to receive support from high-achieving peers who have similar experiences and have learned to navigate the educational barriers to achieve academic success. Existing peer mentor models provide support specifically for Latinx college students to improve academic outcomes. Such programs take into account Latinx unique needs.

For example, the *Promotores de Educación* (PED) program, which was implemented in an urban Southern California four-year university developed for Latinx students, utilized concepts from cultural capital and CCW to improve academic performance and timely graduation (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Here, the researchers address the need to develop a culturally competent peer mentoring program for Latinx students, but the researchers do not provide the results and, unfortunately, PED is no longer in existence. A second example is at a minority urban university that identifies Latinx freshmen as being at high-risk for academic difficulty. Latinx freshmen are paired with master's level graduate students as mentors who provide them with general support, advice, knowledge and companionship (Torres Campos et al., 2009). The pilot program proves to be successful as mentees report higher feelings of campus connectedness/belonging and an increase in motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy (Torres Campos et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that both programs are implemented in a four-year university.

Second, the Project Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success (MALES) began in 2010 as an effort to increase higher education enrollment for Latino males (Sáenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del Real Viramontes, 2015). Currently, Latino males have lower high school graduation and college completion rates compared to their Latina counterparts (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The Project MALES strives to foster a supportive network for Males of Color at the University of Texas at Austin and various neighboring communities. The model is distinctive for four reasons: (a) targets Latino males, (b) utilizes best practices that focus for mentoring Latino males, (c) it is research-driven, and (d) has created a strong partnership between a public research university and several local educational and community partners (Sáenz et al., 2015). Further, the development of Project MALES uses Yosso's (2006)

Community Cultural Wealth as a key framework to support its students (Sáenz et al., 2015). Project MALES serves middle school and high school students, undergraduate mentors, and graduate mentors in order to increase achievement and retention of male Students of Color in both secondary and postsecondary settings (Sáenz et al., 2015).

The next mentor program was implemented at an urban four-year institution in California with the intention of supporting Latinx first-year students who were identified as academically at-risk (Torres Campos et al., 2009). In this study, the mentors were graduate students and were trained to contact mentees at least once per week, engage mentee in the relationship, and met with coordinators to enhance the mentoring experience. Moreover, mentors provided constant support and motivation to their assigned mentees. Results showed that mentored students felt more confident in their academic abilities that included motivation to complete college (Torres Campos et al., 2009). Mentored students also reported having a greater sense of school belonging and an increased awareness of campus resources, which included how to navigate college systems (Torres Campos et al., 2009).

As previously stated, the majority of existing peer mentor literature highlights programs that are implemented at four-year universities (Crisp et al., 2017), which have different structures, student needs, and institutional cultures. As a result, current intervention initiatives may fail to invest in peer mentor programs that specifically target community college students, but more importantly, recognize Latinx students' Community Cultural Wealth that might result in college completion and future aspirations. These mentor models are examples of collaborative student-support programs that are designed to serve and validate Latinx students in efforts to increase to retention. Additionally, some mentor models described here attributed notions from cultural capital and Community Culture Wealth. Such programs seem to be appropriate given

the need to improve Latinx student educational experience, academic performance, and degree completion (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Importance of Community Cultural Wealth in Peer Mentoring

Underpinning the development of mentor programs for Latinx students are the theories of social capital and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Bourdieu (1986) initially defined social capital as a supply of actual or potential resources that are associated with social networks or membership into a group. Yosso later built on this theory, while also challenging its tenets, in developing CCW. Yosso's (2006) CCW framework is a six-part model that stems from a strength-based perspective to understand how Students of Color access and experience college. CCW refers to an "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77).

The framework includes: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital, which may support Latinx students in reaching college completion. For example, Latinx students use their cultural wealth to seek out a sense of community to cope with campus climate that may marginalize their experiences. One way for Latinx students to find a sense of community is through mentoring programs, which is inclusive of the students' personal characteristics, experiences, and recognition of their cultural values (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). In academic settings, the quality and quantity of social networks that Latinx students access may result in academic engagement and persistence (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012). This finding reinforces the importance of relationships for overall college success and adjustment (Moschetti et al., 2017). Moreover, Moschetti et al. document the experiences of Latinx peer mentees, attending a four-university, who report that their mentors enhance their social capital by sharing

resources and opportunities. This is a key finding and, as a result, the following theories will guide the development of this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that will guide this study are: Critical Race Theory (Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001) and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2006).

Together, these frameworks counter deficit practices embedded in higher education that marginalize Students of Color, like Latinx enrolled in community colleges.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that is used in various fields of study that centers race to understand how race and racism impacts social interactions, structures and practices experienced by People of Color (Yosso, 2006). CRT is comprised of five tenets (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006; Yosso et al., 2001): (a) the intercentricity of race and racism, (b) the challenge of dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (see Appendix A). I argue that CRT is important in the creation of the TPMM to examine and explain how community college Latinx peer mentors and mentees make sense of the role of race and racism in their lived experiences.

Community Cultural Wealth

TPMM will challenge the deficit narrative by recognizing and building on Latinx students' CCW and acknowledge the resources they already bring to the educational process (Yosso, 2006). According to Yosso, Community Cultural Wealth is described as various forms of knowledge that often go unrecognized among marginalized communities. To understand Yosso's interpretation of capital, it is important to acknowledge the work of Bourdieu (1986).

Bourdieu outlines that dominant groups in society maintain power within their networks because they create generational wealth for their families and networks.

However, Yosso (2006) countered Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory by framing wealth from a strength-based perspective that applies to Communities of Color. Yosso states that wealth is the accumulated assets and communal resources of an individual or group that are shared with others. Yosso argues that the following six forms of capital are important to empowering the "wealth" of People of Color: (a) Aspirational, (b) Linguistic, (c) Familial, (d) Social, (e) Navigational, and (f) Resistance (see Appendix B). These forms of wealth are essential because it may lead to networks, resources, and knowledge that might produce greater rates for Latinx academic achievement.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the environmental and institutional barriers that impact Latinx completion. This chapter also provides an overview of FYE program and the Puente Project. I also share mentor models that are most effective for Latinx students in order to increase academic achievement. Such programs implement an effective peer mentor component that embeds Community Cultural Wealth as a key framework for development. Furthermore, I attempted to fill that additional gap in the existing research relating to college students who serve as peer mentors. I highlighted their lived-experiences and examined how their involvement in TPMM impacted their own social and academic development. In addition, the review of the literature integrated significant research on Latinx students and community college completion. Finally, this chapter summarizes how CRT and CCW are essential to the framing of this study. In Chapter Three, I describe in more detail the Transformative Peer Mentor Model and the

methodology I used, which includes a review of my research questions, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study examined how the potential of a new Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) had an impact Latinx community college students and their intent to complete their educational goal. Recent research has devoted to investigating how mentoring can be a vehicle to promote social justice (Crisp, et al., 2017; Kivel, 2004; Neville, 2015; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Tovar, 2015). This project focuses on the peer mentors' and mentees' voice as it is important to clearly understand the impact of TPMM. It is important to recognize which elements from TPMM have a direct impact on student success and community college completion. This chapter first describes TPMM. Second, I outline the research questions that drive the study. Then, I review the research design and analysis. I conclude with possible ethnical concerns.

Transformative Peer Mentor Model

Research demonstrates the effectiveness of community college FYE programs and the Puente Project (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Knight, 2003; Laden, 1999; Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Rendón, 2002). The literature clarifies the need for a peer mentor model at a community college that is both transformative and research-based that assists Latinx students towards completion. We know little about student-support programs that incorporate a peer mentoring component. We know less about the effects on the peer mentors of such programs. One possible assumption, which I tested, is that peer mentoring itself increases the likelihood of completion. The study examined how their involvement in TPMM, as peer mentors and mentees, positively impacts their own social and academic development.

A social-justice mentor program may be effective in increasing Latinx student community college completion rates because it integrates academic, emotional and sociocultural support (Crisp et al., 2017). The TPMM is distinct for several reasons: (a) the curriculum design is influenced by best practices to support community college Latinx students' completion; (b) it offers meaningful and experiential learning opportunities based on social justice practices that rebuke the deficit model; and (c) it is intended for the unique needs of Latinx students attending community college. TPMM recognized that community colleges have different demographics, structures, student needs, and institutional cultures.

The proposed TPMM consists of four key elements: (a) usage of counterstorytelling, (b) creation of counterspace by students, (c) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgement of students' Community Cultural Wealth (see Appendix C). I created and examined the TPMM within a FYE program at Queta Community College, which provides academic and social enrichment for first-year students. This study aims to answer two research questions.

Research Questions

1. What do peer mentors and mentees identify as the most meaningful components of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?
2. What forms of Community Cultural Wealth do peer mentors and mentees bring to the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?

A Qualitative Research Design

I conducted a qualitative research study to examine what Latinx peer mentors and mentees identified as the most meaningful components of TPMM. A qualitative research design was appropriate because a key goal of this study was to examine how TPMM impacted Latinx

peer mentor and mentees' aspirations towards college completion. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outlined three qualitative elements that allowed me to understand how Latinx students: (a) interpreted their experiences, (b) constructed their worlds, and (c) attributed meaning to their mentoring experiences. With a qualitative approach, I gained an in-depth understanding from the students' perspectives as I spent considerable time in their natural setting and create strong contact with the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A goal of this study was to develop a program in which TPMM elements were effectively implemented for Latinx students in a community college to enhance completion rates. Qualitative research allowed me to collect and analyze various data sources rather than relying on a single source (Creswell, 2014). For instance, I coordinated two focus groups—one specifically for peer mentors that was composed of seven participants. The second focus group was for mentees, which included five participants. The focus groups were conducted by Queta College staff. After the focus groups were conducted, I facilitated semi-structured interviews with five (5) peer mentor-mentee dyads. However, each participant was interviewed separately. It is important to note that the focus group participants were not part of the semi-structured interviews. Altogether there were 22 participants and their stories proved to be relevant to my findings (see Chapter Four).

Methods

This section outlined the methods I utilized, including: research site and rationale, participant recruitment, access to research site, data collection strategies, data analysis, and conclude with ethical concerns.

Research Site and Rationale

This study required a site that (a) served Latinx students, (b) had low completion rates, and (c) had a significant population of first-generation college students. The site selected for this study was part of the California Community Colleges that serves roughly 43% of Latinx students ([CCCCO] Key Facts). This two-year college is classified as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) because at least 25% of their full-time course-credit students identify as Latinx. In addition, roughly 70% identify as first-generation college students and the completion rates for Latinx at this college is around 36% (CCCCO, 2018).

Rationale for Recruiting Participants

I first coordinated two focus group—the peer mentor group had seven participants, whereas the mentee group had five participants. This resulted in a total of twelve participants. I also selected five (5) peer mentor-mentee dyads for a total 10 participants (see Table 1 below). All participants were enrolled either as part-time or full-time students at Queta Community College for the 2018-2019 academic year. In addition, the study's participants had to be enrolled in TPMM within the FYE Program as either peer mentors or mentees. To select student participants for this study, I incorporated various recruitment strategies. For example, I sent emails to all TPMM participants with a brief description of the study and its purpose (see Appendix D). The email contained a “tinyurl” link where the participants were able to register. Once they opened the registration page, they were able to read the description and purpose of the study. I also made it clear that participation was optional and declining would not jeopardize their participation in TPMM. However, I highlighted that participating in the study would require additional time from their schedules. I included a brief pre-interview protocol that ensured they meet the criteria. This was a short, 10-item questionnaire that asked students for

background information, such as name, major, educational goal (i.e., AA, certificate, or transfer), ethnicity, gender, income level, English proficiency, enrollment status (see Appendix E).

After I got potential participants, I called those who identified as Latinx and asked if they were still interested in participating in the study. I answered any questions or concerns to avoid miscommunication. Again, I made it clear that interviewing was not a requirement to maintain eligibility in FYE or TPMM. Once the students agreed to participate in the study, I also expressed gratitude to and mentioned that they would receive a gift card for their time. Once I confirmed participants, I emailed them the consent forms (see Appendix F and G), which they signed and returned directly to me. Also, I ensured participants' confidentiality and used pseudonyms that I created before I started interviewing and had a legend that enabled me to maintain organization. All documents were saved in my laptop and drive with password protection. The focus groups took place in Winter 2019 and the dyad semi-structured interviews were completed in early Spring 2019 semester. I attempted to select student participants with a balanced number of females and males, from diverse majors, and experiences. However, it is important to note the TPMM consisted of 40 peer mentors—14 males and 26 females. Whereas, there were a total of 72 mentees—22 males and 50 females. These numbers mirrored Queta Community College's student population. The 2016–2017 student population at Queta Community College was 52% female and 48% male (CCCCO, 2017).

Table 1.

Overview of Study Participants

Participant	Title	Year	Sex	Major
Xochilt	Peer Mentor	2 nd	F	Psychology
Daniel	Peer Mentor	3 rd	M	Biology
Olivia	Peer Mentor	5 th	F	Sociology
Oscar	Peer Mentor	3 rd	M	Architecture
Sofia	Peer Mentor	2 nd	F	English
Claudia	Peer Mentor	2 nd	F	Sociology
Ashley	Peer Mentor	2 nd	F	Psychology
Jessica	Peer Mentor	3 rd	F	Sociology
Ofelia	Peer Mentor	2 nd	F	Nursing
Carlos	Peer Mentor	3 rd	M	Business Admin.
Liz	Peer Mentor	7 th	F	Architecture
Andres	Peer Mentor	2 nd	M	Studio Art
Austin	Mentee	1 st	M	Graphic Design
Rafael	Mentee	1 st	M	Political Science
Flor	Mentee	1 st	F	Psychology
Lucia	Mentee	1 st	F	Computer Science
Angelica	Mentee	1 st	F	Sociology
Gabbie	Mentee	1 st	F	Child Dev.
Chesly	Mentee	1 st	F	Social Work
Sandra	Mentee	1 st	F	Psychology
Alberto	Mentee	1 st	M	Business Admin.
Alicia	Mentee	1 st	F	Social Work

Transformative Peer Mentor Program Background

The First-Year Experience program initiated a peer mentoring component as part of its offerings in 2016. FYE administration and a group of FYE student workers understood the

importance of mentoring Students of Color. As a result, they began to brainstorm ways to create and implement an effective peer mentor component. The peer mentor had no budget, therefore, peer mentors were all Queta College students who volunteered their time to guide FYE students for one academic year. Since 2016, the peer mentor component has gradually evolved and it began to receive attention by students wanting to mentor first-year students and campus administrators. Below, I provide a history timeline for the reader to understand the foundation of TPMM.

With the support of FYE administration, the FYE mentor program inaugurated in 2016–2017, but it had a very limited budget and was managed by FYE student workers. Student workers facilitated trainings for the peer mentors and were able to bring outside consultants to support with their training module. The peer mentors learned different strategies to enhance their mentor practice, but they received minimal support throughout the academic year. As a result, students, mentors and mentees alike, exited the program. Although there was no student tracking in 2016–2017, there were roughly 40 peer mentor volunteers and 60 first-year mentees. In the 2017–2018 academic year, a coordinator was hired part-time to assist with all programming aspects of FYE. However, the coordinator became the main facilitator of the FYE mentoring model. Although the budget was still limited, the coordinator attempted to structure the program, embedded relevant training topics and activities, and communicated with students often. Mentor trainings and social activities were offered twice per semester. During this academic year, there were 51 peer mentor volunteers and 76 first-year mentees. It is also important to note that 32 students exited the mentor program due to various reasons, such as leaving Queta College altogether, getting a part-time job, prioritizing their academics to increase their GPA, or not connecting with the mentoring program.

In 2018–2019, the mentor model evolved into the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM). FYE coordinators applied for a campus grant that allowed for the expansion of the program. Although the budget did not allow to compensate the peer mentors, there was funding to coordinate social activities, purchase material (e.g., notebooks, pens, food, etc.), and invite outside consultants to train peer mentors. Coordinators recruited, interviewed, and selected 40 peer mentors (14 males and 26 females) during Spring 2018 and 72 first-year mentees (22 males and 50 females) during Summer 2018. The peer mentors were campus volunteers and they engaged in an intensive 16-hour TPMM training module that began in the Summer of 2018 (see Appendix H). Furthermore, peer mentors were expected to attend all TPMM trainings during the academic year. The initial mentor meeting occurred two weeks before the Fall 2018 semester, at the “Mentor-Mentee Orientation,” which included a keynote speaker, lunch, and ice breaker activities. During their initial meeting, both students completed a formal mentoring agreement that outlined their roles and responsibilities, meeting dates/times, and preferred forms of communication (e.g., texting, email, phone call).

Peer mentors had the choice of mentoring one, two, or three first-year students. However, most peer mentors opted to mentor only one (1) student. Students were carefully matched based on major, career choice, hobbies and/or personalities. Peer mentors were provided with guidelines during trainings to prepare for mentor meeting and at the end of each session, both were required to complete the Peer Mentor Log. Peer mentor-mentee dyads were required to meet at least three (3) times per semester for a minimum of 30 minutes either on or off campus, as long as the meeting site was safe and convenient to both parties. Mentor meeting topics ranged from time management, academic resources on campus, career exploration, leadership development, and discussing personal matters, such as lived-experiences. In addition,

as a dyad, they were to attend one (1) FYE workshop or a campus-wide event during the 2018–2019 academic year. More importantly, peer mentors regularly met with TPMM coordinators to discuss their mentor practice, mentee academic progress, and provide updates on academic, professional, and personal matters.

Site Access

Although I have been working at Queta Community College for two years, I had the opportunity to do consulting work for their FYE Program in 2016. This opportunity allowed me to build strong relationships with key institutional actors. In early Fall 2017, I presented to the Vice President, the Dean, and Associate Dean of Student Services the current work I was doing as a Program Coordinator and I intentionally included my action research plans. The administration was confident that TPMM would be effective and they were extremely supportive of the research process. I provided them with frequent updates to ensure I maintained that critical buy-in.

Data Collection

Data collection strategies for this qualitative study included: two focus groups and ten semi-structured interviews. These strategies allowed me to understand how participants perceived TPMM and the impact on completion of their educational goals.

Focus groups. A focus group is an interview method to collect data since the group of people have knowledge on a certain topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A focus group allowed for participants to share their views, learn about other's views, and possibly shift their own views according to what they learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With a focus group, participants had interactive conversations where data was generated that could not be captured in an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I created two focus group protocols (one for peer mentors and the

other one for mentees) that contained 10 questions aligned with the purpose of the research (see Appendix D and E).

Focus group were moderated by a neutral third party (Queta Community College staff member) who was comfortable with the group process and who was able to keep the participants on task (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The moderator also probed participants in a productive and timely manner. It was crucial for the moderator to draw from the group dynamics by being attentive and reduce the likelihood of missing key information. The moderator took detailed notes, which included participants' actual quotations, session date and time, names of the participants, and descriptive information about the setting for credibility and record.

I coordinated two focus groups—specifically one for peer mentors and the other one for mentees—to examine the relationship in real time and better understand the context in which peer mentors and then mentees interact with each other in the same setting. Each focus group had from five to seven participants who were selected from the general TPPM pool. Participants followed the same “tinyurl” link and had the same registration process. However, the last question asked students if they were interested in participating in (a) focus group, (b) individual interview, or (c) open to both options. This selection process also allowed me to get a broader perspective about TPMM participants. Two separate focus groups allowed the moderator to capture what peer mentors share about trainings and/or meetings, their mentor practice, and aspirations.

I analyzed how the “Educational Road Map” peer mentors created related to their own aspiration toward college completion (see Appendix H). I explored specific events that related to the mentor experience and practices that impacted their success and/or future educational and occupational aspirations. The “Educational Road Map” was a reflective activity that allowed

students to highlight future aspirations and important milestones—academic and nonacademic—while also pointing at events or situations where they experienced deficit practices and the impact these may have had on their scholar identity, specifically how students connected this to Aspirational and Navigational Capital.

Whereas, the mentee focus group highlighted the impact of mentorship and changed behavior towards goal setting. For example, I analyzed what the mentee identified as the outcome of creating a Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goal with their peer mentor and noted their ability to visualize themselves reaching their goals, specifically how students connected this to Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital. The S.M.A.R.T. Goal worksheet empowered students as they enhanced their goal setting skillset (see Appendix I). Here, students created objectives that are structured and with each step they were provided with clear direction in order to accomplish their goals.

Focus groups were conducted prior to the semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to refine my semi-structured interview protocols. Focus group data was audio recorded using a digital recorder. Both focus groups were over one hour and I used Rev.com to transcribe verbatim in a format that enabled analysis. I selected a location on campus, away from the FYE office, to ensure confidentiality and natural setting for them to speak. Focus group participants were provided lunch and a \$5 coffee gift card for their time.

Semi-structured interviews. I interviewed separately five peer mentor-mentee dyads, which allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the TPMM elements that were most meaningful towards meeting their educational goals. Although there are three types of interviews—highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured/informal—I used semi-

structured interviews because it allowed for flexibility to engage in informal conversation while maintaining uniformity with all interviews (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I created an 18-item interview protocol for peer mentors and an 18-item interview protocol for mentees, which aligned with the research questions, but also promoted conversations (see Appendix J and K). For example, the proposed research questions (RQ) probed into TPMM's four elements. These are as follows: (a) *Use of Counterstorytelling*—students shared their lived-experiences to empower each other; (b) *Creation of Counterspaces*—students created counterspaces on or off campus to create a stronger community, (c) *Practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring*—students learned, reflected, dialogued and collaborated in order to create immediate change; and (d) *Acknowledgement of CCW*—students activated their CCW to overcome obstacles to complete college. The protocol allowed me to probe about student's perceptions towards TPMM. The interview protocol was vetted by Queta College Research Department to ensure questions were clear to peer mentors and mentees.

Semi-structured interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were roughly 45 minutes. I reviewed the study's purpose, confidentiality agreement, and informed consent before commencing the interview. The purpose of the interview questions was to learn more about how Latinx students describe their participation in TPMM and aspirations towards college completion. Interview questions were aligned to the research questions. For example, asking students, "How has participating as a peer mentor/mentee for FYE motivated you to complete your educational goal? If so, how? If not, why do you think?" allowed me to measure students' experiences as participants of TPMM. Interview questions included: (a) college aspirations and expectations, (b) barriers, (c) experiences in TPMM, and (d) recommendations for improving TPMM. All participants and individuals mentioned by name during the interviews were

assigned a pseudonym to conceal their true identity. In addition, interview locations were carefully selected to ensure participant confidentiality. Participants had the option to interview on/off campus or via Zoom for their convenience. All interviews were on campus and I reserved private rooms that were not within the FYE Center to ensure privacy. A pre-determined location created a comfortable and natural setting for students to speak. After, I transcribed interviews using Rev.com to carefully ensure validity. I ensured the member-checking process because it allowed the students to revise their past statements and/or elaborate on details.

Data Analysis Methods

There are certain elements of qualitative research that I incorporated, such as: (a) collecting data in the *natural setting* where the students participated in TPMM, (b) continuously *reflecting* on my role to avoid personal biases, and (c) *using multiple data sources*—semi-structured interviews and focus groups—with the appropriate protocols and to capture what the students were doing and saying (Creswell, 2014). I conducted two focus groups and 10 semi-structured interviews with TPMM participants to determine the role that TPMM has in helping students complete their educational goals. Data was analyzed to examine the students' change in academic confidence and sense of belonging, goal setting, and/or navigating on campus resources as a result of the TPMM. I utilized Creswell (2014) six-step strategy to (a) organize and prepare the data for analysis, (b) read and analyze all data, (c) code all data, (d) generate descriptions and themes/categories, (e) use narrative to convey findings of the analysis, and (f) interpretation of qualitative research (pp. 197–200). However, I kept in mind that data analysis should be done simultaneously with data collection because I did not want to miss the opportunity to gather reliable and valid data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I utilized the qualitative data analysis tool, Quirkos, to help me observe and organize codes. I assume that TPMM elements will create sense of empowerment while potential codes might include: importance of sharing of counterstories, passion for helping others, motivation to change Latinx educational statistics (e.g., increase college completion rates), and desire to change societal perspectives of Latinx students. I predict that another theme might include acknowledgement of students' own CCW that might transpire into categories such as: family support, TPMM as a family-like environment, and doing the impossible to reach their goals.

I ensured *respondent validation*, also known as member checking, and shared the interview transcripts with each participant to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participant said or did and avoiding biases (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Interviews were transcribed via *Rev.com* and I wrote codes on the margins to identify patterns related to my study's purpose. I also listened and read along from transcriptions in order to write memos on what I saw or heard from this data source and started creating emerging categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2013). Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were coded for underlying themes. However, once I reached saturation, I knew that there was no new information or insights to my study.

Role Management

I was cognizant of my role as the FYE Program Coordinator, my role as the main facilitator of the TPMM, and UCLA researcher. I informed the mentor team that I was a doctoral student and the importance of my study for them and the Queta College community. More importantly, as a facilitator I shared my counterstory with students with the intent to instill motivation that, as Leaders of Color, we have a special responsibility to complete our educational goals. This also allowed me to reflect on my positionality as a Latinx first-

generation college, low-income student who transferred from the CSU to the UC system. I was also transparent with my direct supervisors about managing my roles and allowed for flexibility with time spent on this study and my position duties, as long as it is equitable. They understood, not only the completion crisis for Latinx students, but our collaborative commitment to support Queta Community College students by implementing TPMM to inspire meaningful change.

Credibility/Trustworthiness

I ensured to triangulate all data sources by comparing and cross-checking data collected via semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since I was strongly involved with participants through TPMM trainings and meetings, I consistently stressed transparency and confidentiality to avoid threat of reactivity. Also, an important threat to validity was my own bias as a researcher. To avoid confirmation bias, I had to consistently challenge my own pre-existing assumptions and hypotheses. I also had to be mindful during interviews to not influence specific answers from participants. Therefore, I was aware of my body language, maintained a “poker face,” and did not elaborate their answers if, for example, they struggled with answering. I also reviewed findings with Queta Community College research team to review conclusions that I might have missed, but at the same time, they were able confirm that my conclusions were sound.

Ethical Issues

The students’ identity was protected and they understood that none would be shared with Queta Community College administration, faculty, or staff. As the researcher, I adhered to UCLA’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to ensure privacy and safety. Second, I re-informed participants about the purpose of the study and assessed their commitment level often. Participants needed to understand that if they felt overwhelmed by the study process or felt

pressured to initially say “yes” to me; they had the right to exit the study with no repercussions. Participants received a hardcopy consent form to review and sign. I also provided them with a copy for their personal records. In addition, students were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Lastly, all data sources, such as audio files and notes taken during interview were discarded after interviews are transcribed. While quantitative data is informative for documenting patterns and testing relationships that can be generalized, it does not capture the voices of students and a nuanced account of their lived experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this study, I sought to identify which components of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM), embedded within a First-Year Experience (FYE) program at a community college, impacted Latinx peer mentors and mentees' intention to complete their educational goals. I asked peer mentors and mentees to identify the most meaningful elements of TPMM. I also examined their Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) to reveal how it promoted college completion. With a qualitative approach, findings emerged from two focus groups and 10 semi-structured interviews. This chapter outlines the themes that emerged from the interviews and the Peer Mentor Model they helped me design. The themes helped me to create, develop, and implement what I named Transformative Peer Mentor Model (also known as TPMM). The TPMM themes include: (a) use of counterstorytelling for empowerment, (b) creation of counterspaces, (c) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgment of students' Community Cultural Wealth.

In my initial point of contact for analysis, I coordinated two focus groups as follows: one had seven peer mentors while the other had five mentees. The focus groups were facilitated by Queta College staff. The purpose of the focus groups was to select students from the general TPMM pool and enable participants to hear and reflect on the collective work that these participants engaged in. My second analysis consisted of five (5) mentor-mentee dyad semi-structured interviews, which resulted in 10 participants who were not part of the focus groups. Here, I interviewed each participant separately. Therefore, the study had a total of 22 participants, which included 15 females and 7 males. I used the qualitative data from both—focus groups and semi-structured interviews—to describe the findings in this chapter. Therefore,

I will specify when the data came solely from the peer mentor-mentee dyad semi-structured interviews.

I analyzed data through Creswell's (2014) six-step approach that included: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis, (b) reviewing data and recording general thoughts, (c) developing a qualitative codebook defining codes, (d) generating descriptions and thematic categories, (e) utilizing narrative analysis to present the data, and (f) interpreting the qualitative findings. The two research questions that guided this study asked:

- (1) What do peer mentors and mentees identify as the most meaningful components of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?
- (2) What forms of Community Cultural Wealth do peer mentors and mentees bring to the Transformative Peer Mentor Model?

The findings that follow tell how Latinx peer mentors and mentees experienced TPMM and how each element worked in conjunction to validate their lived-experiences. TPMM's first element illustrated how peer mentor-mentee dyads shared their counterstories with each other in an effort to create and nourish the mentoring relationship.

TPPM Theme One: Usage of Counterstorytelling for Empowerment

The narratives shared by the participants unveiled their unique experiences as Latinx community college students. The first theme of using counterstorytelling for empowerment derives from how peer mentors utilized their stories (*testimonios*) to reframe their notion of schooling from deficit to that of empowerment for their mentees. Since significant data highlighted the power of counterstorytelling, but I will specifically focus on three peer mentor-mentee dyad stories. The stories detail the following: (a) developing a STEM identity, (b) increased self-confidence, and (c) reclaiming mental health as act of self-love. The peer mentor

and mentee relationship, that is centered in a TPMM training module, allowed for counterstories to transpire and transform. These counterstories illustrated how these three peer mentors shared with their mentees how they have persisted despite institutional and environmental barriers.

A key finding that emerged here was how counterstories were a powerful tool that allowed peer mentors and mentees to speak about their lived-experiences, a tool which provided an alternative narrative that is often untold. More importantly, peer mentors created the conditions that allowed their mentees to tell their own stories; in that manner, both engaged in encouraging dialogues that resulted in action. In what follows, I introduce Daniel, peer mentor, and his mentee, Lucia. Both students share a similar counterstories related to their majors.

Developing a STEM Identity

Key to Daniel's and Lucia's story is their persistence, especially how they navigated through the difficulties of being Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors. Of all 22 study participants, which included those students from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, only two were declared STEM majors. Daniel declared Biology as his major, whereas Lucia is majoring in Computer Science. They were a paired peer mentor-mentee dyad who struggled to pass a required-transfer class—calculus—in fall 2018. Both were accepted to a CSU in Northern California, but could not afford the cost, and therefore enrolled in a community college. Daniel has been at Queta College for three years. He has taken calculus three consecutive times because he has had difficulty passing this major- and transfer-required course. His story begins with institutional barriers.

The structure currently in place within the college district allows students to register in the same credit-bearing course for a maximum of three (3) times. If the student does not pass the

course in the third attempt, they can complete the “Fourth Attempt Petition.” Daniel explained how the policy functions:

You can take it three times and then if you don’t pass it the third time, you could petition for them to allow you one more time. But if they say no, then you would have to take it out of the district at a completely different campus. So, for me it would be [Rose] or [Del Mar] College.

Daniel’s self-advocacy led him to navigate campus structures so he could be well-informed about petition requirements. Daniel took the appropriate steps required to complete the application, which included a document explaining the reason for the previous grades, strategies to improve his academic performance, and also met with a counselor. Although Daniel thought he had a strong case, the Office of Admissions and Records committee denied his petition.

Daniel reported, “I tried to petition to see if I would be able to get another opportunity to take it here, but I’m not going to be able to, so I will have to go to another campus to take it.”

Attempting to retake the math course made Daniel feel incompetent. He also began to doubt his potential in STEM. He recalled: “There was self-doubt. I was like would I make it. Would I be able to make it through?” College systems and structures oftentimes become barriers for students.

In Daniel’s case, he will have to take calculus class outside the district, a fact which changes his transfer timeline. However, Daniel did not allow this situation to push him out of college; rather he devised a plan to take the course at another community college during summer 2019. He stated:

So, what I have planned is I’ll be taking it during one of the short-term semesters...that way I don’t have to commute from one school to another during the [Spring] semester...and that way I don’t have to balance a whole bunch of classes.

In fact, it is common for community college students to swirl⁶ within various colleges as an effort to complete their educational goal. Daniel's situation with math caused him to become a swirler at a college outside his home district. Daniel will have to overcome a different set of challenges, such as longer commute on public transportation, adjusting to a new college campus, and navigating different policies and systems. Daniel was able to identify how his difficulty in math functioned as an institutional barrier.

In his interview, Daniel specifically reflected on the long commute and managing study time and his work schedule. He shared:

Transportation would be the biggest issue since I will be commuting from one college to another. It would take me more than an hour to get from one campus to another. I might have to take an evening class so I can still work in the morning. But I think everything else will be resolved. In regards to transcripts, I can meet with a counselor who will help process the grade to make sure it passes over because I can't take the wrong math class. No matter what, I will make sure I put a reasonable amount of time into the coursework to get a passing grade.

Daniel described multiple challenges that are often reported by students who attend more than one college. Although Daniel remains hopeful that he will pass the math class, he had to consider his financial needs. Daniel cannot afford to quit his part-time job or work less than 20 hours per week. As a result, he will have to enroll in an evening class that factored in a commute that is roughly two hours each way on public transportation. Lastly, since Daniel is concerned that he will not receive credit for math, he spoke about the importance of meeting with a Queta counselor to ensure that the math class is transferable. Daniel shared, "the numbers are different at [Del Mar] and [Rose] College, but I double-checked the class was the right one." Daniel's concern is valid, especially since colleges have different course codes, especially since the two community colleges do not belong to the same district. For Daniel, this disparity is confusing. If

⁶ A term used to describe a student who enrolls in more than one college.

he were to take the incorrect math course, his transfer timeline would be affected. Here, Daniel began to reflect on his educational experiences as a future swirling student and how this might impact his scholar identity.

Sharing counterstories cemented Daniel and Lucia's mentor relationship, since they met over six times in the fall semester. This relationship enabled both to reframe their math experience that empowered them to persist with their educational goals. During her interview, Lucia expressed shame for not passing calculus, especially since she also had difficulty with the subject in high school: "In high school I took AP calculus twice, but got D's. This is my third time taking it, and I feel very discouraged." Lucia's math experience in high school damaged her scholar identity. As a college student, Lucia began to fear the subject. She explained, "That's scary. It's real. If I fail it colleges will see that and it'll show in my transcripts." Lucia understood that her struggling to successfully pass calculus could jeopardize her transfer process. However, since Daniel shared his *testimonio* [testimonial], she received the academic and moral validation needed to persist. He reminded Lucia that calculus is a difficult subject and shared his past experience with the course:

I told her it was fine that I had to drop that class before. So, it is a difficult class to take, so she shouldn't be too hard on herself about not being able to pass it during her first try, that I didn't pass it either and I am still not getting the hang of it, but hopefully next semester. I know she'll be able to learn from this experience and hopefully pass the class.

Daniel encouraged Lucia to consider withdrawing from calculus to avoid a failing grade on her college transcript. Lucia attempted to pass the class because she is student who does not give up easily. Later, she reflected on Daniel's advice: "He also told me to withdraw from calculus so I wouldn't get the D, but I was like no I won't. But I was like damn I should've listen to him."

Daniel's counterstorytelling allowed him to validate his mentee's experience as a Latina, first-generation college student pursuing STEM.

Daniel continued to validate Lucia. He encouraged her to believe in her academic worth: "your grades don't define you...it doesn't reflect you as a person, you could always try again." Furthermore, Daniel ensured that Lucia did not blame herself for her math abilities. Rather, Daniel pointed out how math professors oftentimes do not engage students and come with a deficit perspective. This remark allowed Lucia to reflect and assess her calculus professor's teaching pedagogy. Lucia stated, "I wasn't even aware of that, but it makes sense. I just didn't grasp the material, but I wouldn't pin [my grade] on the professor because I could've done more, but so could she." Lucia noted that her professor did not create a learning environment that addressed the specific math needs of the students.

Further, the validation Lucia received from Daniel was valuable because she had been consistently receiving a message from society that was discouraging. Lucia understood the inequities she and her family have faced. Lucia described:

I guess public education is different than what, let's say like a white person gets 'cause it's like, their parents' background, and my parents' background is different. My parents are immigrants and their parents went to college. So, that's really a big thing, I think. When I feel discriminated, it's because of that.

Here, Lucia identified the racial disparities that have impacted her K-12 schooling and lived-experiences. Although Lucia grew up in the projects and her K-12 educational experiences did not prepare her adequately for STEM, she is determined to persist. Lucia is underrepresented as a Latina in STEM. If not for Daniel sharing his narrative and constant validation, her reflection around her ability to do math could have looked different. Therefore, her listening and reflecting on Daniel's counterstory has also empowered her. Similarly, in the following example, the peer

mentor-mentee dyad shows how counterstories helped both, peer mentor and his mentee, develop confidence.

Increased Self-Confidence

Oscar (peer mentor) is a third-year student with a major in Engineering. Oscar was born in the U.S. but was raised in Mexico until the age of 10. Oscar mentored Austin, who was born in Mexico and came to the U.S. with his family as an infant. Although Austin was accepted to a CSU, due to his legal status he was not able to receive financial aid. Consequently, he enrolled in community college. While Oscar and Austin created a special relationship that was centered on culture; they also focused on increasing their academic strengths and self-confidence.

Although both men described themselves as timid; Oscar effectively utilized his counterstory to create a trusting environment. Oscar stated:

What I do is when I first introduced myself I always tell my story first because I feel like once you share your story that's when they kind of feel more comfortable. And even then, maybe they don't feel so comfortable in sharing their story. But I think for the most part what has worked for me is I share my story first.

Oscar shared his counterstory that enabled Austin to open up and gain confidence. Austin recalled:

At first when I meet my peer mentor I wasn't as open as I am right now but little by little I started gaining confidence and I actually opened up to him. I am a shy person and my peer mentor has helped me with being confident.

Austin's self-confidence increased as a result of learning from his peer mentor and being validated by him as well.

In one particular instance, Oscar shared with Austin his own academic struggles in an effort to validate his mentee's academic experience. Oscar told his mentee the challenges that came with being a full-time student while working 20 hours per week. Balancing work and school became challenging for Oscar. As a result, in the fall 2018, his grade point average

(GPA) suffered. Similarly, Austin balanced family obligations and taking 12 units, which included developmental math. Austin immediately noticed that his math instructor did not make an effort to engage with him or other students. Austin described how his math professor did not show authentic care to students' academic needs:

I actually didn't feel comfortable speaking to him, he actually wouldn't walk around to ask the students if they needed help. He wasn't explaining the lessons well. He didn't put the effort to help, it just seemed like he didn't care about the students, but his job, you know?

Austin observed that the professor was not invested in his students' success, therefore, Austin formed a perception that his professor was simply there for the money. Consequently, Austin did not feel comfortable asking him for help or suggesting that he slow down. Austin further described the classroom dynamics:

He [the instructor] was moving too fast with the lessons and we had quizzes every day. I wouldn't understand what he was saying at times and I didn't feel comfortable asking questions. Nobody told him anything since all the students were adults and since I'm not use to professors going through the lessons fast so I kind of slacked off because of that.

Austin could not keep up with the professor's pace and felt responsible for "slacking off," when in reality he was not able to manage the course material due to his professor's teaching approach. Austin also made an interesting point that provided reasoning as to why he and his classmates might have avoided to speak to the professor about his teaching approach. Students often have a perception that in college, unlike high school, students are adults who must take sole responsibility for their learning.

The math professor likely did not improve his pedagogical practices since Austin noticed how students stopped attending class: "little by little it ended up being like 15 students only showing up." The learning environment Austin was part of was, unfortunately, centered on deficit practices that did not optimize students' learning. In turn, Austin began to question his

academic abilities. In fact, Oscar remembered a conversation he had with his mentee: “Oscar, I don’t want to drop classes in college, but like I feel like this math class is like wanting me to drop.” Although Austin did not intend to drop a course in college, he reached a point that caused him to doubt his academic efficacy. However, Oscar used his own counterstory in an effort to ease his frustration. Oscar recounted the advice he provided his mentee:

When he wanted to drop his math class he was super stressed out and I think he was very anxious. So, I was able to calm him down and I told him that it was okay to drop his class and I also told him that he had to retake it if he dropped. I gave him a few personal examples that I had experienced where I was feeling the same way. I think I told him about my fall 2018 classes where I was super stressed out with all of my classes, not just math.

Oscar’s advice demonstrated he authentically cared for his mentee’s well-being as he affirmed Austin’s experiences in math. Oscar also acknowledged that although withdrawing from classes in college is an option, he reminded his mentee that he would have to simply retake the course. Oscar’s advice is rooted in his own frustration with math as he too has to meet several requirements to complete community college. His counterstory empowered Austin and gave him self-agency to make rational decisions in regards to his education.

Austin was eventually pushed to withdraw from the math course. He stated, “I never thought of dropping out of college, that’s the least I wanna do right now, but my math class was difficult and I saw no choice.” Although he felt disappointed with his decision, he knew that if he stayed in the math class, he would have received a failing grade that would have negatively affected his GPA. Rather, he opted for the “W” (withdraw) on his transcript since it will not be calculated into his GPA. While Austin’s scenario was not ideal, he realized that he could retake math during his second year, allowing him to focus more on increasing his GPA. Although Austin knew that his decision to drop the course would delay his completion timeline, his mentor

showed him tremendous support. Austin shared, “I don’t know when I will finish [Queta], but I need to pass that math class first. Oscar knows how I’m doing and that’s what matters.”

Research shows that when Latinx students are initially placed in developmental courses, they are less likely to advance through the course sequence or transfer. Yet, Oscar continued to believe in Austin’s academic abilities and validated his experience as a first-year college student. Oscar shared his counterstory with Austin that highlighted his own motivation to work harder during the winter 2019 session and, as a result, he increased his GPA.

More importantly, Oscar created a supportive environment for Austin and provided him with helpful time management and study tips. Austin reported an increased confidence in his academic abilities. In fact, Austin attributed his persistence from fall 2018 to spring 2019 to his mentor’s constant motivation—“Oscar has helped me in many ways, such as being motivated and never giving up. I don’t feel nervous about going to college anymore.” Listening to Oscar’s counterstory emerged as a critical source for Austin’s increased confidence in his ability to excel in college. In fact, of the 10 mentees (from both focus groups and semi-structured interviews), 9 declared that their academic confidence was increased due to their peer mentor’s constant guidance and ability to develop their competencies. In the last example, the mentor-mentee dyad discussed how counterstorytelling helped them shift their experiences with mental health. Austin needed validation from his mentor given that he was not receiving it from his professors. The counterstory in the next example offers an alternative voice of a female peer mentor-mentee dyad who developed a unique sense of community within academia to cope with anxiety and depression.

Reclaiming Mental Health as an Act of Self-Care

Sofia (peer mentor) is a second-year who began her educational journey at a CSU. However, due to her legal status and lack of financial aid, she became a reverse transfer.⁷ She was matched with Gabbie (mentee) since both have aspirations to become educators. During fall 2018, Sofia dealt with a personal challenge that affected her mental health and academic performance. Sofia shared:

One personal challenge that I developed was the lack of care for my mental health. I started getting a lot of anxiety. And I sort of fell into a depression that I didn't want to acknowledge... just because school was getting really stressful and I just let it overload and overload. And then, also having to deal with my parents divorcing, then having to pay bills and rent and everything with a minimum-wage job...it just destroyed my mental health last semester and I honestly didn't know what to do.

Sofia's example revealed the family and financial obligations students have. Additionally, Sofia also spoke about the mental health stigma in Latinx communities since she refused to "acknowledge" her depression.

Early in the fall 2018 semester, however, TPMM trained peer mentors on the importance of mental wellness and self-care. Sofia validated TPPM's trainings:

The trainings that we go to, they're all based off of a holistic point of view. Not only will I be able to know how to take care of my mental health and learn how to combat the imposter syndrome, if it does happen. I feel like I will be better prepared once I hit a four-year university with the skills that I've learned through the [TPMM] workshops.

More often than not, undocumented students suffer from anxiety that affects their mental and physical health. Therefore, the appropriate institutional supports are needed to prevent students from stopping out. For example, when Sofia sought services from the health center on campus, there was only one full-time therapist during the winter session, so she did not receive an

⁷ Reverse transfer students enroll at a community college with previous credits from a four-year university (Hagedorn, Castro, & Townsend, 1999)

appointment until the spring semester. Although Sofia is heavily involved on campus and she visited the Dream Resource Center for support, she did not feel welcome or that it offered appropriate health and psychological services. In fact, eight participants out of twenty-two self-identified as undocumented. All expressed frustration with financial aid policies and/or lack of appropriate support on campus.

Sofia candidly shared with Gabbie how her legal status reduced her educational opportunities and quality of life and the impact this had on her mental health. Similar to Sofia, her mentee had been battling with depression since high school and was taking medication. Gabbie's depression impacted her academic performance in fall 2018 since there were days she could not attend class. Gabbie disclosed:

My first semester of [Queta] I was battling depression. So that was a really hard thing because they were putting me on new medicines and stuff. And I couldn't really ... I would take it in the morning before class, and then it'd be hard to leave my room, or I'd be throwing up and stuff.

Gabbie emphasized Sofia's support during this time in understanding her situation. Gabbie explained, "if I was ever sad or anything, she always told me that I could call her and stuff, and I could just talk." Sofia empathized with Gabbie and provided her emotional support since they had similar contextual experiences. This example is consistent with the research that shows how mentored students are more likely than non-mentored students to report they had at least one person who provided emotional and academic support. Further, Sofia utilized the knowledge she gained from TPPM's training and understood the importance of campus referrals. Thus, Sofia walked Gabbie to the health center on campus to find alternative ways to support her mental wellness.

Training and supporting peer mentors through their mentor practice is imperative to the success of TPMM. Moreover, TPMM's approach was holistic in which peer mentors were also

validated and their well-being was detrimental to their mentor practice and scholar identity. In fact, 8 out of 10 mentees expressed gratitude on how their mentor constantly checked-in and asked about their overall well-being. TPMM coordinators exhibited the importance of being a holistic practitioner who value students for more than just their GPA and service them with compassion. Sofia expressed:

I truly appreciate the fact that, not only are we focused on the mentees, but there's also a care that is given to the mentors, because the teachings that we're taught and the trainings, they're based off of things like mental health. And mental health can go both for the mentee and the mentor... in order for the mentee to be helped, the mentor has to be helped first.

Battling with anxiety and/or depression in college had an impact on the women's scholar identity. Yet, through counterstorytelling, Gabbie and Sofia supported each other to persist and also end their silence about mental illness. Both academically excelled at the end of the fall term and reframed their identity of self to one of empowerment. Sofia and Gabbie posed a counterstory that underscored the urgent need to further explore how Latinx students cope with psychosocial factors during college, especially when students do not have emotional support at home or school. Next, I discuss how among peer mentor and mentees, the use of counterstorytelling resulted in the development of counterspaces that were necessary to have a sense of belonging in the college campus.

Summary of TPMM Theme One

The first theme captured the stories that Latinx community college students. The counterstories depicted the many barriers first-generation college Latinx students encountered that could have pushed them out of college. Yet, TPMM participants disrupted the dominant narrative and gave a voice to students who are often silenced. Peer mentors shared their counterstories with their mentees as a strategy to support and also validate their mentees lived-

experiences. In fact, all five (5) mentee-dyad participants expressed how their peer mentor's support was most meaningful to them. These mentee participants appreciated the mentors' holistic approach that made them feel authentically cared for, which, in turn, positively impacted their decision to persist from fall-to-spring term. In the following section, the student narratives from the focus group and semi-structured interviews were used to describe how students created counterspace on and off campus.

TPMM Theme Two: Creation of Counterspaces

The counterstories depicted the many barriers that impacted Latinx community college student persistence. The counterstories further demonstrated how peer mentors and mentees shared their struggles that resulted in them creating academic and social counterspaces. Counterspaces serve as places in which deficit perceptions of People of Color are challenged in an effort to create and maintain a positive racial climate on or off campus (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). In addition, Yosso and Benavides López (2010) defined as counterspaces as physical, social, and epistemological that challenge oppressive conditions. Theme two unfolded the ways that counterspaces functioned within academic and social gatherings. Special attention was given to the social activities that transformed from interactions to counterspaces, which enhanced students' sense of belonging. The following narratives displayed how students created counterspaces and shared mechanisms to succeed in college that in turn created a sense of community. Students created counterspaces in the following ways: (a) studying together, (b) at TPMM trainings, (c) at TPMM socials, and (d) within the FYE program. In the first example, we turn again to Daniel and Lucia, the STEM majors who struggled in calculus.

Studying as Counterspace

TPPM gatherings served as an academic, social, and professional counterspace that were considered as welcoming spaces that honored Latinx student voice and experiences. This study found that peer mentoring gatherings have the potential to function as a counterspace for Latinx students. A key finding in these examples demonstrated the importance of how the students created counterspaces as a way to challenge the dominant narrative. For instance, Daniel and Lucia's experiences in math impacted their academic confidence and sense of belonging in STEM. Nonetheless, both students persisted in college as STEM majors. Daniel allowed Lucia to vent about her math experiences and it became evident to him that her STEM identity was tarnished. Daniel provided Lucia the moral and academic support she needed to succeed in calculus class. Given that both students were taking calculus in fall 2018, with different professors, Daniel suggested studying together at the campus library. Daniel recalled, "I told her that if she would be open to meeting at the library and studying. And she said, yeah, she felt comfortable doing that." Studying together was a critical action for Lucia since she was extremely discouraged about her struggles in calculus.

Daniel and Lucia's mentoring relationship transformed into a counterspace of reflection and transparency. There, Daniel and Lucia created an affirming learning community that, unfortunately, had not been provided for them in class. As a STEM peer mentor-mentee dyad, they took their time to understand the material and exchanged study tools. Daniel also took this time to teach Lucia how to navigate college. For instance, Daniel taught her how to reserve a study room at the library since Lucia did not have study space at home. Also, they researched and applied for STEM-specific scholarships. Studying together allowed Lucia and Daniel to

resist the mechanisms that often push out Latinx students from STEM. In the next sub-section, I describe how TPMM trainings were also sites that students created into counterspaces.

TPMM Trainings as Counterspace

Peer mentors transformed TPMM trainings into a critical physical space of belonging and networking. TPMM trainings implemented CRT and CCW frameworks to explore how peer mentors made sense of race and racism in their lived experiences. TPMM asked peer mentors to consistently reflect on their schooling and to challenge the dominant discourse by recognizing the capital they already possessed. For example, one training activity allowed peer mentors to learn about institutional and environmental factors that impact Latinx students' college success. As a collective, they were able to identify and share with each other which factors threaten their education. Then, peer mentors created their Educational Road Maps and identified key moments that impacted their scholar identity.

This activity became a counterspace within a counterspace for peer mentors through reflection and observing the various strategies they have applied to navigate dominant structures. Of twelve peer mentors who engaged in focus groups and semi-structured interviews, seven spoke about the impact of the Educational Road Map activity. Angela (peer mentor from the focus group) reflected on her journey (see Appendix O):

It helped you see everything you've done, you've accomplished and what you've been through. Whether it's been good or bad. It made you realize what you wanna achieve and what you have to do to get through it. It has a destination for you which you like, obviously, it could be like getting your masters or getting your career officially. But you also have to know that there's gonna be obstacles in the way and life happens and you know, sometimes it's gonna set you back but just know that you're gonna make it there if you keep trying.

Angela was able to reflect on her resilience as an undocumented, first-generation college student, a story from the margins that is often distorted by the dominant narrative. In fact, Sofia, who is

also undocumented, expressed a similar sentiment, but related it to her reverse transfer process (see Appendix P):

Looking back at what I drew on this paper and honestly it brought back like why I drew everything that I did. Because towards my reverse transfer, that was like the darkest place. I didn't wanna be at [Queta] I honestly felt less than everybody who remained at the Cal State. I purposefully colored it a bright pink and I put little fireworks 'cause ever since that happened, I learned to celebrate every step that I take or any accomplishment that I have made academically. Whether it be, I made the dean's list for a third time. That's something that I never thought I was gonna be able to say, like wow at [Queta] I was able to do this. I think for me, again it serves as a reminder of my resilience.

Peer mentors themselves often felt dehumanized throughout their educational journey and were trained to blame themselves for their *failures*.⁸ Yet, all 12 peer mentors (from both the focus group and semi-structured interviews) stated that they felt comfortable and safe at the TPPM trainings. Olivia expressed TPMM's embracing and affirming culture, "people come up to me and I don't even know them. They say hi, like they hug me, even if I don't know them. You're like, 'Who are you?' But, all right. I'll give you a hug."

It is evident that TPPM allowed peer mentors to connect with each other and receive emotional support that resulted in a healing space and a sense of belonging. In the next subsection, students described the importance of TPMM non-academic gatherings and how they provided a greater sense of belonging on and off campus.

TPMM Socials. TPPM also offered social activities, such as "Coffee & Community" and Saturday hikes. These non-academic gatherings allowed TPMM participants to create connections with each other that often resulted in an opportunity to socialize, in a sense of belonging, and in friendships. For instance, the hike provided peer mentors and mentees a unique connection outside the academic setting that humanized them and also allowed them

⁸ TPMM countered the word failure, rather, failure was taught as a growth opportunity.

relate to one another. Ashley (a peer mentor who participated in the focus group) attested to how the hiking activity fostered a sense of belonging with her assigned mentees, but also with the TPMM group:

I went to the hiking thing too with my mentees and that was towards the beginning. So not only did that help break the ice with my mentees, but with other mentors. Even though I didn't really see them, it did make a difference to be in a less professional setting just hanging out, all struggling to go up the hill. We bonded and it was fun. So that would be nice I think to have more. Not necessarily trainings just hang outs. Like designated hang out times. To just reflect and talk about an issue that we're going through with a mentee that maybe [peer mentors] already gone through and they can give you advice.

Ashley stressed the importance of having social activities that create opportunities for students to develop deeper connections with the larger TPMM network, but also for peer mentors to exchange knowledge regarding their mentor practice.

Peer mentor Andres (focus group participant) also expressed how important the hike was to the unity of TPMM participants:

It was open to the mentors and the mentees. So, at the same time they were like, when that happened it was just, it was a great idea because everyone got to know each other and getting along not just as mentors and mentees, but as friends, like companions. I feel like that's something that should keep going towards this program because that helped us to communicate with each other.

Extending participation opportunities also transformed into counterspaces where peer mentors and mentees de-stressed from academic pressures, financial hardships, family obligations, and more. The "Coffee & Community" served as a welcoming space that offered free coffee, treats, and different relaxation activities as an approach for students to cope with daily stressors.

Gabbie (mentee) explained how attending this social activity allowed her to relax by making her "stress doll" alongside her peer mentor, Sofia. Gabbie stated, "for me personally, I was stressed during finals week, and when I came there it was just like I could not be stressed and just enjoy my time." Gabbie emphasized why organizing activities that are supportive and welcoming

within the college setting is critical in creating a sense of belonging, especially for first-year students. Further, for Latinx who are first-generation college students, these environments increase their sense of belonging and motivation to persist despite personal and academic struggles. Next, I discuss the interactions that occurred in the First-Year Experience (FYE) Program, which further enhanced the meaning of community as a form of counterspace.

FYE as Home

Lastly, since TPMM is housed inside the FYE Center, the space organically became one where students felt welcomed and staff was readily available to help. For example, Xochilt confirmed the FYE Center dynamics when she stated, “FYE is very welcoming, everyone I would say is always very willing to help you in whatever it is, whether it be like signing up for a class or learning how to navigate the [student portal].” In fact, the FYE Center has an area called the “relaxation station” where the focus is to encourage students to practice mental health and wellness. For example, FYE provides mindfulness exercises, access to books for personal development, such as “The Four Agreements” and “Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” and often offers water and snacks since our students battle with food insecurities.

As the student walks into the FYE Center, they will immediately be greeted and notice the FYE staff and professors’ biographies (also known as “bios”) decorating one of the walls. The purpose of the “bios” is to humanize FYE staff and professors as they share pictures of their own families, college graduations, and life experiences. The “bios” provided the students with comfort and a sense of family as they continue to develop their scholar identity. The FYE Center also has a display of peer mentor-mentee dyad pictures along the “Peer Mentoring Wall of Fame.” The aim of this display is to connect all FYE Center guests with the power of

mentorship, but especially motivate FYE students to seek mentoring relationships not only within the Queta community, but beyond.

The mentor-mentee dyad pictures are also surrounded by the “Community Cultural Wealth Tree⁹” that was a collective effort to showcase the capital peer mentors’ bring to TPMM and their mentor relationships. Along the CCW tree, there are also pictures of peer mentor-mentee dyads. Lastly, the FYE Center also exhibits an array of flags from Latin American, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries to highlight the importance of diversity, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and more (+) (LGBTQIA+) to foster the critical importance of fluid sexual and gender identities. Designing a critical and warm environment allowed students to explore their identity development, create community by being involved in the process of building the FYE Center, and foster trust among FYE staff, professors, and peer mentor-mentee relationships.

Providing students with a positive experience at the FYE Center allowed them to see FYE as a home. Key to this finding was how peer mentors and mentees were able to assimilate to the campus culture that resulted in their desire to complete their educational goal. This is true for Olivia and Sofia, both peer mentors reverse transferred from a CSU to Queta Community College. Sofia articulated:

Being a first-generation student, talking to my family about it, they just won’t understand what I’m talking about. So being able to find a family and a home at FYE, it really helped me a lot and that’s who I consider to be my strongest support system.

Sofia shared the realities of being a first-generation Latina college student. More importantly, she talked about the importance of having a home that is supportive for first-year of students. In

⁹ Activity adapted from the work of Victoria Benavides, Theresa Brostowitz, and Doug McAcy.

particular, Latinx first-generation college students need strong connections not only with peers, but with faculty and staff who may have similar cultural values and/or or life experiences.

The presence of positive influence within the FYE Center does impact student success.

Olivia alluded to her motivation to persist now as a community college student:

Honestly, I feel like FYE has changed the way I viewed my own college path. I feel like, when I came here from [CSU system] I lost hope. I was like, I don't want to go to college anymore. Like, I messed up, you know? That's what I thought. And then I think just reading up on the program itself I was like, Wow, I need to do this! This is what I need to get back on my feet, and continue how I've always been motivated. So, I think I've always just found support from different networks, and programs, and people.

Both peer mentors shared a story that also attributed to the importance of the development of a critical space that offers positive staff and faculty relationships, which may influence a sense of belonging and persistence. The FYE Office removed one less obstacle for Latinx first-generation college students as they navigate the already challenging campus structures since it offered a supportive environment. Through the FYE Office welcoming spirit, TPPM coordinators were able to sustain meaningful relationships with peer mentors and mentees.

Flor, a mentee also echoed the importance of having caring staff who validated her scholar identity. "I feel like I would have struggled more. Because of [FYE staff] and speaking to [TPMM coordinators], and speaking to my mentor really given me like less anxiety." In the following section, I examine the practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, which enabled peer mentors and mentees to reflect on their lived-experiences as first-generation Latinx college students in the community college system.

Summary of TPMM Theme Two

Theme two offered an approach that supported Latinx first-year students and help integrate them to Queta College. Here, the reader notes that the counterspaces were created by and for students. TPMM simply provided the space, but it was the students who connected with

each other and often shared some mechanisms to thrive in college. For example, a peer mentor-mentee STEM dyad created an academic counterspace through studying because they did not feel validated in the classroom. Participants also created counterspaces at social gatherings that happened on and off campus.

The counterspaces that students created allowed them to network and increase their sense of belonging. Further, students saw the FYE Program as a second home. Students felt that their multiple identities were welcomed by the FYE staff. Counterspaces proved to be necessary dynamic in this study because students showed an increase in motivation to persist. In the next sub-section, I introduce the third TPMM element that engaged peer mentors and mentees in Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring (Jain & Solórzano, 2015). Here, I specifically use the stories of two paired peer mentor-mentee dyads to demonstrate how Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring functions.

TPMM Theme Three: Practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring

TPMM allowed mentor dyads to turn to Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring (Jain & Solórzano, 2015). Peer mentors and mentees created mentoring relationships that were rooted in trust and sense of belonging. TPMM trained peer mentors to create an active learning setting in which they became co-learners with their mentees, which is opposite from the banking concept. TPMM trained peer mentors to problem-pose with their mentees to develop an approach for mentor-mentee dyads to dialogue, collaborate, and reflect. Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring allowed students to think critically about their oppressive conditions, but also effect change within their communities. In particular, utilizing Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring allowed for reciprocal relationships, critical reflection that ultimately resulted into action-based learning. In the examples to follow, the peer mentors invested time to create a reciprocal relationship with

their mentees. As a result, mentees enhanced their educational experiences by learning how to critically navigate academic challenges as they activated their self-advocacy.

One function of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring was for peer mentor-mentee dyads to establish a two-way relationship that countered the traditional notion of mentoring, in which the mentor is seen as the expert. Xochilt, peer mentor, ensured she created an equitable space for her mentee, Flor. Xochilt stated:

My goal is to make her feel like if she ever needed to talk to someone about anything, that I was there for her. The way we discussed things, the way we treated each other, the way we contacted each other was all like, we were peers you know? Like as equals, as friends, as even classmates, so I definitely do not think that she thinks that I had any authority.

TPMM trained peer mentors to redefine their mentoring practice as People of Color and to value their mentees' talents and lived experiences. Xochilt's narrative highlighted her approach towards mentoring an undeclared Latina first-year college student. Xochilt's approach spoke about the importance of building a reciprocal mentoring relationship that allowed both students to learn from each other.

Flor and Xochilt discussed topics relating to academics and political issues that impacted their livelihood. For instance, they talked about the importance of voting during the General Election in November 2018. As a mentor-mentee dyad, they understood the urgency to vote. In fact, together they researched all the measures and politicians on the ballot. Xochilt recalled:

We were talking about how important it was to go vote and we would have deep discussions. I remember discussing how we can learn more about the propositions because we were a little unclear on that, so we began to research. We also learned a little bit about each of the candidates running.

Through Problem-Posing Mentoring, the women were able to analyze and question the political structures that perpetuate the oppression of Communities of Color. For instance, both women had a critical conversation about how the media portrayed Latinx immigrants. Xochilt stated,

“the news targets and blames Latino immigrants for many thing that are going on in the U.S., but immigrants also come from other countries.” Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring also activated the students’ critical thinking skills in relation to how they understood the democracy process. In this example, the women took action that disrupted the current political climate, which has been impacting disenfranchised Communities of Color. Xochilt stated, “To be able to see that, the two of us went out to vote. We know that our voices matter and that we made a difference. By voting, we made a decision for us that affect us.” Similarly, Flor stated the importance of voting: “young voters account for half of the voting population and through voting you have the opportunity to influence the government.” Key to this finding is how the women utilized Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring as participatory and also critically examined the political conditions relating to their realities.

Peer mentor-mentee dyads engaged in Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring to establish a reciprocal relationship that was centered in critical thinking and empowerment of self and their communities. In fact, all mentor-mentee dyads highlighted how they motivated each other to continue with their educational goals. For instance, Xochilt was able to reflect on her own academic performance as she interacted with her mentee Flor.

I’ve seen [Flor] succeed in her academics, and that’s what motivates me, and that’s what’s helped me grow as a person because sometimes I feel like there’s so much going on in my life, and I see my mentee that is going through so much more, and she’s handling things in a very strong way that makes me realize that I need to work harder.

Xochilt reciprocated the inspiration for Flor to persist despite if her completion timeline went beyond the traditional two-year completion time frame. In one Flor’s counseling appointments, a counselor reviewed her educational plan that outlined the courses she needed to transfer in two years.

However, Flor knew that her graduation timeline would look differently. Flor stated, “she was just like ‘you need a time period’ and I was just looking at her like I don’t need that. No, I’m not gonna mark a date or anything. It’s when I am ready to leave. When I’m ready to take the next step.” Here, Flor did not feel that her academic needs were acknowledged by the counselor. She described:

I can say that she didn’t listen to my needs. She was kind of vague, she was persistent about me transferring, but never gave me the advice to help me get there. She was blunt and I appreciate that, but she needs to know that having a time frame isn’t necessary it mostly damage a person’s motivation.

After her counseling appointment, Flor felt overwhelmed as many first-year students often feel about their educational plans. In fact, most Latinx community college students do not complete their educational goal within two years due to barriers. Counselors have the ability to inspire students to also engage in critical reflection and action with the goal of helping them identify their academic and future career goals. Perhaps the counselor’s intention was to encourage Flor. Yet, the counselor operated from a banking approach because the conversation did not account Flor’s lived-experience or her academic needs.

Through mentorship, however, Flor was able to question the counselor’s advice and did not accept the two-year timeline as her reality. Xochilt took this opportunity to have a critical dialogue with her and proposed a new solution to her reality. More importantly, Xochilt empathized with Flor, which the counselor was not able to do during their appointment. Xochilt recalled the advice she provided her mentee: “It doesn’t matter how long we take to finish.” Since Xochilt related to Flor’s situation, she enabled her mentee to feel included. Flor stated, “my mentor has helped me realize that I can succeed and that I’m not alone.” Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring yields for a compassionate practice, which allows students to construct their own realities.

Xochilt helped Flor shape her own reality, especially because she knew her mentee had a learning disability. First, Xochilt shared with Flor that she would transfer in three years because she had redefined her transfer process. Further, Xochilt took this as an opportunity to discuss the obstacles that many community college Students of Color encounter as they persist. Together, they identified Flor's obstacles, such as family responsibilities and the lack of academic preparation she received in K-12 schooling. Xochilt engaged Flor in a critical conversation about how and why the oppressive conditions within academia impact Latinx students' educational goals. Xochilt was able to bring the knowledge she had previously learned in TPMM training in hopes that her mentee would also develop a desire to create social change. For example, Xochilt learned that Queta College's completion rates¹⁰ for Latinx student was below 40%. For Xochilt, learning the statistics, along with identifying multiple barriers that impede Latinx students from completing, had a tremendous impact on her scholar identity. Xochilt expressed:

During [TPMM] training, we went over [Queta's] statistics that made me realize that students oftentimes fall out of their studies because they get so caught up in working, and it made me realize that there's a lot of students that start college, but who don't finish, or that take too long to transfer. Those statistics...it just made me think and realize that everything that I'm doing now is going to have an effect on my life in the future, so it made me realize that I have to work my hardest to change our numbers.

Here, Xochilt described her motivation to increase the completion rates for Latinx students in community college.

More importantly, Xochilt displayed a strong desire to create immediate change when she provided this knowledge with her Flor the mentee. Xochilt stated:

¹⁰ A reminder to the reader, percentage of degree, certificate and/or transfer-seeking students who started first time in 2011–2012 was tracked for six years through 2016–2017 and were able to complete a degree, certificate or transfer-related outcomes.

In our last meeting, we talked about not transferring in two years and what that means to Latinx students. [Flor] brought up feelings of not feeling ready and I mentioned I hadn't applied to transfer because I do not feel ready. Then I told her about the statistics I learned. I encouraged her to apply even if she doesn't feel ready. She motivates me to complete my educational goals. I was in her place and I know how she feels and it's important we both reach our goals.

Xochilt and Flor established their mentoring relationship through dialogue and action. Xochilt and Flor discussed why completing community college is a pressing matter for both as Latina women. Flor recalled when she learned about Queta College Latinx completion rates from Xochilt. She stated, "I was like wow, I did not think the parentage was that low. I agree that people need guidance. I thank [TPMM coordinators] for choosing [Xochilt] for me. She's wonderful." Through Xochilt's mentoring, Flor was able to critically reflect on Queta College completion rates while acknowledging the need for Latinx to be mentored.

Xochilt's passion of creating change within the Latinx community has encouraged Flor to persist with her educational goals. Flor acknowledged that her mentor motivated her to persist. She stated, "the meetings we have make a big difference. She suggests what next steps I could take next, but just speaking, letting it out, ranting basically helps me. She also gives me motivation. That betters my day honestly." Compassion was central to Flor and Xochilt's relationship. Key to this story is how Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring allowed Flor to construct her own reality. With the implementation of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, the peer mentor was successful in increasing her mentee's aspirations to persist and change her community.

In a similar example, Olivia created a mentoring relationship in which her mentee Chesly felt that her life experiences and voice were acknowledged. Olivia nourished the mentoring relationship. Olivia stated, "I try to make sure to be as approachable as possible. I think what I've done a good job with is sharing my struggles, and my experiences from the past. And that's

opened up conversations with her.” Here Olivia emphasized the need for mentors to be reflective about their lived-experiences that would result in effective mentoring. In fact, Olivia was extremely open with Chesly about her personal and academic struggles that impacted her academic plans and mental health. Olivia reverse transferred from the CSU system because during her first-year she dealt with a sibling’s arrest that eventually led to their deportation. Olivia remembered missing class often to attend court and translate the hearings for her parents. Her family situation combined with her academic struggles in math pushed her out of CSU system at the end of her first year.

Chesly struggled in math and with anxiety during her first semester in college. Olivia’s approach was holistic because she shared her story to ease Chesly’s frustration with math, actively listened to her needs, and validated her without using stigmatizing language. More importantly, during a mentoring meeting Olivia aided Chesly in creating a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goal to ease her academic anxiety. Olivia posed reflective questions, such as: (a) what is your goal and why is it significant? (b) what obstacles could interfere with reaching her goal? (c) what are some actionable steps you will take this semester to reach your goal? For Chesly, the prompting stimulated critical thinking that resulted into a meaningful dialogue. The mentee described why Olivia was effective with her approach:

Yes, it was helpful to identify my goal, and then what action am I going to put into actually completing the goal, and the effort, and having to do it in a certain amount of time as well. [Olivia] is someone who is there and I get questions or concerns answered, I just text her really quick or if anything we talk.

Olivia was able to build on Chesly’s strengths when they talked about a possible action plan towards reaching her S.M.A.R.T. goal. It was important for Olivia to have Chesly critically reflect on *why* her academic goal mattered. Both engaged in a process of learning through

inquiry and action. In fact, Olivia also created a S.M.A.R.T. goal of her own. She expressed, “I created my goal, but then I also like broke it down. This allowed me to be realistic when it comes to planning out a goal...like the accountability for and my mentee.” Olivia was able to critically reflect on her own goals, but also mentor practice. Since Olivia understood her position as a student-mentor, she was able to actively work with Chesly towards reaching her educational goals.

Through Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, Chesly realized that her goal was not simply the action of passing her fall courses, but connected her motivation to persist to her parents’ struggles. Chesly stated, “I’ve heard their own stories and how they started. It’s had a big impact on my life, and how they’ve done it. In my own way, it encourages me because they were able to do it.” Olivia and Chesly co-developed skills in critical thinking, goal-setting, and more important, having a vision to improve the living conditions for themselves, their families and communities.

As a peer mentor-mentee dyad, Olivia and Chesly created a reciprocal relationship where they supported each other. In fact, Chesly understood how she helped her peer mentor promote her own persistence, self-advocacy skills, and campus involvement. Chesly described:

Maybe when she started off new as a [Queta] student, she was probably nervous and maybe didn’t have support, she didn’t have someone there. Maybe when she learned to be a mentor...even for her own growth, she just started trying to explore new things, and doing stuff, and getting resources. When she saw me struggling, maybe that’s how she felt as well when she started here, and by helping me, she has learned from me.

Indeed, Olivia did report an increase in self-advocacy and social integration at Queta College, which was a result of both learning from and being inspired by her mentee Chesly. Olivia attested to this, “I applied here because I wanted to be more involved, and I wanted to get to know people, and I wanted to feel supported here on campus. I just wanted to make the best out

of my last year.” Olivia will transfer to a CSU in Fall 2019 and has attributed her motivation to transfer to TPMM.

Peer mentors understood the lived-experiences of their mentees and supported mentees to reflect and identify possible solutions to their situations with the intention of creating change. However, in order to create change, the interaction time was critical to the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship. All five mentor-mentee dyads physically met an average of four times in the fall semester when TPMM only required three meetings. All five mentor-mentee dyads also kept constant communication with each other via email or phone calls, which resulted in satisfaction with TPMM and a sense of belonging at Queta College. In fact, the most significant indicator of peer mentor effectiveness was that of ten mentees who were interviewed via a focus group and semi-structured interview, nine expressed an interest in becoming peer mentors next academic year. This is evidence that mentees were positively impacted by TPMM and have a desire to give back to their TPMM community.

Summary of TPMM Theme Three

Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring called for the roles of the peer mentors and mentees to interrupt the traditional notion of mentoring. The narratives here highlighted how the mentee was “no longer a docile listener” (Freire, 1970, p. 81). Mentees and peer mentors collaborated to come up with solutions to situations related to their academics and/or communities. The reciprocal relationships and the critical thinking that followed action were furthered enhanced by peer mentors communicating the importance of Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). In the following section, I utilized CCW to identify which capital is most significant for TPMM participants. In the next sub-section, I used the narratives of students who participated in the groups interviews and semi-structured interview.

TPMM Theme Four: Acknowledgment of Community Cultural Wealth

TPMM introduced peer mentors to Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework during training and they were able to identify their capital and, in turn, they were also able to identify their mentee's CCW. Utilizing the CCW framework allowed TPMM to capture the lived-experiences of Latinx students. Yosso's CCW had a significant function in the mentoring relationships that supported the current literature surrounding the academic persistence of Latinx community college students. Yosso defined CCW as an "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression" (p. 77). CCW is comprised of six forms of capital that Students of Color bring to academia. These are the following: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, social, and resistance capital.

Although peer mentors and mentees demonstrated all six forms of CCW, the majority of participants provided insight into how aspirational and familial capital specifically contributed the most to their academic persistence. Thus, the findings presented here demonstrated how aspirational capital intersected with familial capital. In this section, I also discuss how TPMM activated participants' CCW towards reaching their educational and career goals.

Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as "the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality" (p. 77). Of 22 interviewees (focus groups and semi-structured interviews), all stated they overcame several barriers in their educational journey. Yet, all 22 participants stated that their educational goal at Queta College was to transfer to a four-year institution. The participants consisted of 15 self-identified females and seven males. Further, from these 22 participants, 8 disclosed their

undocumented status, 2 had reverse transferred from CSUs, 15 stated Spanish as their first language, and all were first-generation college students. A key finding to this study is that from 22 participants, 11 students were admitted to the UC or CSU system. However, these students opted to attend Queta College after high school graduation mostly due to financial reasons.¹¹ Peer mentors and mentees possessed rich histories and resilience and it was evident that they used aspirational capital as motivation to persist despite inequities.

One institutional barrier that resonated with 17 of 22 participants was their initial placement in developmental math that often resulted in their struggle to advance through math sequence. All 17 participants specifically activated their aspirational capital to support their desire to complete the math sequence that ultimately leads to the transfer path. Developmental courses are designed to prepare students to succeed in college-level courses, however, research shows that students who place into such courses are less likely to persist. Yet, TPMM participants remained hopeful, learned to navigate this institutional structure, and utilized their self-advocacy to seek tutoring.

In her interview, Gabbie (mentee) stated that math was causing her stress because she felt that as a college student she was “so bad at math.” However, Gabbie combated the imposter syndrome and instead sought tutoring. Gabbie stated, “I didn’t struggle as much because I would stay after class and I asked for help. I would raise my hand during class, so I didn’t struggle. I felt like I was, but passed it with a B.” Gabbie felt she was struggling because in high school she had teachers who supported her learning. Here, she described her positive learning experience, “in high school I finished math early. I didn’t have to take it my senior year, but that’s because

¹¹ There are other reasons why students might opt to attend community college instead of a four-year university.

the teachers that I had, were always on top of me and motivated me.” Often, professors who teach developmental courses might have a deficit approach that results in them having low expectations for their students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). However, TPMM peer mentors were trained in CCW and taught to have a strength-based pedagogy and how to promote their mentees’ self-advocacy skills.

For example, Angelica a mentee had doubts about her math ability, but her peer mentor enhanced her aspirational capital by encouraging to attend tutoring. Angelica shared how her peer mentor supported her math goal, “she was guiding me to achieve the goal and kept up with me to make sure my goal was met.” Angelica’s peer mentor encouraged her to use her self-advocacy to attend tutoring and ask questions despite feelings of self-doubt. Angelica stated:

I had to find a way to pass the class. So, I started going to tutoring almost every day. That’s where I would do my homework. I wasn’t afraid to ask questions because at first I didn’t want to be the one asking questions and waited for somebody to ask the question hoping they’ll ask. With time, I was more confident with asking questions because I was like, no one’s going to ask for me. I have to look for myself.

Both mentees in this example passed their developmental math courses, but have yet to complete the math sequence. Students who are in developmental courses often feel frustrated since these are non-credit bearing courses, which ultimately impact their completion timeline.

Additionally, since all 22 participants self-identified as first-generation college students, they all reported about the challenges they overcame with the transition from high school to college. Even when students felt pressured with the demands of college, they remained hopeful and strategically navigated through different challenges as first-year students. For example, Xochilt, now a second-year Psychology major, spoke specifically about her first-year struggles:

I initially came to [Queta] not knowing what I wanted to study and I felt that I was wasting time, but I have always known that attending college was going to be something extremely challenging. I have also always grown with the mentality that if I want to do

something I'm going to do it, regardless of the obstacles that may come my way. I try to not let that get to me because I know my capabilities.

Xochilt focused on major exploration and redefining her scholarly identity during her first year, but also ensured that her academic goal remained a priority. She attributed her persistence to her CCW, "I believe aspirational capital is very important because it helps you have a vision of the future, but also realize I have to do something in order to make that happen." Xochilt understood that having a dream to obtain a degree is merely the first step, however, she will have to continue to take proactive steps towards reaching her goals.

Similarly, Xochilt's mentee Flor demonstrated a high-level of aspirational capital despite not having a declared major during her first year of college. Flor expressed:

I'm still undecided about my major, but I do see myself transferring to CSUN or probably even Dominguez Hills. I'm not quite sure but just one of those universities. I know at the end of the day, everything's gonna be okay and I will succeed, pass my classes, go further in life, and maybe even get my PhD.

Often, first-year students dedicate their first year to major and career exploration and might feel uneasy about taking longer to complete or enrolling in non-credit bearing courses. However, Flor has begun to think about graduate school since she has aspirations to obtain a doctorate. This example also highlighted the importance of visiting with a college counselor to ease feelings of confusion as students transition from high school to college. In the next example, I further describe barriers that most first-year and first-generation college students encounter.

Sofia (mentor) began her educational trajectory at a CSU, but she was misinformed about her financial aid award letter. As a result, she became a reverse transfer within the first weeks of the semester. Sofia did not seek academic counseling since she was pressed with time, and registered in classes that she assumed were transferable. She recounted, "I didn't know what was expected of me or what classes I had to take. I just took classes that I thought were

interesting. Later I met with a counselor and I was told the classes I took weren't transferable."

Sofia's narrative is consistent with the research surrounding first-generation college students since they tend to have limited knowledge about college systems and thus make decisions unknowingly. Sofia took a semester of non-transferrable courses at Queta College and was at risk of being pushed out from college yet again. However, she recognized that her aspirational capital motivated her to persist and pursue a teaching career. Sofia explained:

From the moment I reverse transferred, I knew that I had to find a way to get back into a four-year university. And because of that downfall I feel like I have to do something to get back to where I was. Even if I had to come to community college and start from scratch again, I don't mind it as long as I do get a degree and become the teacher that I want to become.

Moreover, TPPM supported peer mentors' future career aspirations in various fields, such as education, medicine, and social work. TPMM enabled peer mentor participants to reaffirm their future career paths. Sofia described how her participation in TPMM has influenced her future teaching philosophy—"Through TPMM, I've been able to exercise at a really early stage, before I do become a teacher, to know how to manage...how to persuade a student to continue with their goals when they are at a down point." This sentiment was similar for peer mentor Ashley who stated how TPMM helped her identify her future career path in academic counseling:

I was in between counseling and museum studies so I applied for an internship and TPMM. I got both, but I thought about it more and decided counseling was more for me. So, I became a mentor and I think for me, at least, it really reaffirmed that this is what I wanna do. I'm really passionate about it and I think I can continue to help people hopefully because I've seen my mentees grow so much and advocate for themselves.

TPMM strived to activate peer mentors and mentees aspirational capital. For instance, TPMM connected students with internship opportunities, discussed career options and resume-building strategies. TPMM also helped peer mentors recognize their true potential and passion

in life to heighten their aspirational capital. TPMM facilitated powerful conversations about the meaning of education and the impact it has on Communities of Color and how their future professional work is necessary to ultimately uplift their communities. Oliva acknowledged that her future aspiration is to implement CCW in her counseling approach:

I just feel like these six, this model, it's good, it's ...broad enough for everybody. I feel like anybody can relate to it, and you can go deep into conversation with this, and people are able to connect through this. Again, people are able to have good conversation. I don't know, I feel like this is a really good model. I think maybe I would probably want to share this still as a college counselor.

Olivia's aspirational capital was further activated by TPMM because she envisioned herself applying CCW in her counseling pedagogy by bridging theory into practice. She understood that Yosso's framework could be used as a tool against deficit pedagogies since she is committed to her community and changing the statistics for Latinx students in higher education. Olivia further stated:

When I think about aspirational capital, I want to do that for people. I want to give back, I want to continue doing things for myself and my family. Yeah, there's a lot of things that I want to accomplish, like when I graduate college, like in my community. I'm not sure if it exists yet, but I've always wanted to create a college center in my community. A college center for parents and students, where they could come and get help with college applications, financial aid. I don't know details, but it would be a college center for parents to come in and participate in workshops, just get informed.

Olivia was able to make another connection with her future career in education and strongly aligning it with her community's needs. She understood that Communities of Color often lack the appropriate resources that threaten the improvement of educational outcomes. Thus, her community has become a driving force as she hopes to create a community center that aligns with CCW. Olivia's aspirational capital was reinforced by her desire to empower herself and her community. Although TPMM participants were motivated to succeed for various reasons, one common thread that was consistent with all five mentor-mentee dyads was how

their aspirational capital interwove with their familial capital that was critical to their academic persistence.

Familial capital. Familial capital is referred as the “cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). All five mentor-mentee dyads interviewees expressed how their family is a main conduit of motivation who inspire them to complete their educational goals despite how many barriers they have encountered. However, 8 of 10 mentee-mentor dyad interviewees stated that they grew up with the familial expectation that they would attend and complete college. These eight participants described how their parents supported their schooling, such as creating a college-going culture at home and investing in their education.

Daniel described how his parents made education a priority from a young age:

I always knew that I would be going to college since I was a little kid. My parents were always encouraging. Since I was in elementary school, they would get us in programs after-school. They would take us to programs in the library. Anything that we needed that was school related. They would go with us on field trips. Then as I went onto middle school and high school, they would always do their best to provide with supplies and tutors, but in high school it's when I started talking more about college and they would help me. Honestly, they couldn't like help with the process, but they were there for moral support. There wasn't any question whether I was gonna go to college, it was just which one I was gonna go to.

Daniel portrayed how his parents were extremely involved with his education and also highlighted the sacrifices they made, like providing a tutor and consistently attending school-related events, in an effort to support his education. Daniel recognized that familial capital has been critical to his academic success. More importantly, Daniel's family has been supportive despite if his transfer timeline already exceeded two years. Daniel stated, “they're not like, ‘Oh when are you gonna be finished?’ Like, ‘Hurry up,’ or anything they're just like very

supportive.” This type of supportive messaging from parents is crucial since community college students tend to take an average of six years to complete their educational goal.

In another example of family involvement, Gabbie described the support from her father:

My dad would always make sure that I had snacks and water and stuff, because I wouldn't leave my room, I would just be like studying. He would make sure I was okay. Also, in high school, I was involved in a lot of clubs. So, he would always be there, for everything. For prom committee, if we needed to sell stuff, he would buy stuff, he was always there.

Gabbie's narrative provided a unique look at Latinx parents' involvement because her father was morally supportive and heavily involved in her educational experience, but also ensured he was providing basic necessities. Often, Latinx parents redefine their school participation because there seems to be a cultural misalignment between their own notions and what school systems expect from parents. Furthermore, Lucia also described a similar support that she received from her mother. She stated:

My mom always said, 'you have to go to college. Instead of doing chores and I had an essay due, for example, she would say 'let me do that' or 'it's fine, your brother will do it.' She would understand, she is very supportive.

The Latinx culture tends to socialize women to be caretakers while men are the providers. However, Lucia's narrative countered the gender roles and stereotypes of Latina women since Lucia's mother ensured that she did not sacrifice her education. Rather, her mother reduced chores by assigning some to her brother and, in that manner, she instilled the value of education in their family structure. Latinx parental engagement generally is not recognized, instead it is seen from a deficit perspective by mainstream schooling systems. Yet, these examples demonstrated how parents indeed value education, even though they had limited knowledge regarding the college process. TPMM countered the deficit notion that often assumes parent's

lack of involvement in their children's education. In fact, parents were interested in their children's education, which resulted in TPMM participants' decision to persist in college.

Since TPMM utilized Yosso's CCW model, findings also indicated how peer mentors and mentees acknowledged that support extended beyond family relationships and how they fostered community within TPMM. Participants expressed how their familial capital was enhanced by their mentoring relationships. Specifically, 18 of 22 participants (from focus groups and semi-structured interviews) stated that their mentoring relationships eventually developed into seeing each other as extended family. For example, in the fall 2018 term, Lucia was awarded a STEM scholarship and invited Daniel to the reception where he met Lucia's family. Daniel remembered, "she invited me to the scholarship banquet, and then we were there to celebrate with her family too. Daniel understood that mentoring transcended beyond the formal structure as he was invited to participate in a special occasion with Lucia and her family. Daniel was able to describe his mentoring work to Lucia's parents and, in turn, they were able to observe that Lucia's support system outside the home.

Similarly, Sofia and Gabbie created a strong relationship centered in similar contextual experiences. This allowed the process of building a sense of family to form organically for the peer mentor-mentee dyad. Sofia stated, "we're able to speak to each other freely and I feel like we already passed a stage from seeing ourselves as just college mates to actually considering ourselves to be a bit of a family." It is evident that the students became part of each other's lives. In particular, this type of support was crucial for Gabbie to continue with her education at Queta College. Gabbie expressed, "If I was doing this on my own, I'd probably be like 'no, I don't want to do this. I'll just go get a job. But since she's there to help me, it motivates me to keep going." Mentees acknowledged that their peer mentors were invested in their education as much

as their own families. As a result, mentees also authentically cared for their peer mentors' overall well-being. For instance, Chesly ensured that she checked in with her mentor often since she knew Oliva had several responsibilities outside her mentor role. Chesly stated, "I would ask her what she's doing like how is work or family-related kind of stuff. I also asked her about her education like where else did she get accepted for transfer." This example highlighted how mentees also engaged in familial capital through the maturity of their mentoring relationship, in which they felt cared for but also reciprocated a similar sentiment for their peer mentors.

Summary of TPMM Theme Four

This sub-section provided a glance on how Latinx peer mentors and mentees utilized their CCW to persist with their academic goals, but also how it functioned within their mentoring relationships. The findings suggested that aspirational capital and familial capital were most salient for peer mentors and mentees. First, it was evident that students encountered various obstacles in their educational paths, such as being a first-generation college student or struggling to pass development math. Yet, students' goals remained high. Also, peer mentors supported mentees and their goals by providing them with resources and moral support. Second, student participants recognized that their families supported their academic goals. This finding is relevant because it counters the deficit notion that Latinx families/parents do not place importance on their children's education. Together, aspirational and familial capital allowed students to feel supported and motivated them to persist with their educational and career goals despite the inequities.

Conclusion

Peer mentors and mentees attested that TPMM's core elements had a significant role in their mentoring relationship. The four elements were as follows: (a) use of counterstorytelling

for empowerment, (b) creation of counterspaces, (c) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgment of Community Cultural Wealth. Further, findings indicated that all four TPMM elements were interdependent and could not function properly without each other. With a qualitative approach that interviewed 22 participants via focus groups and semi-structured interviews; findings indicated that TPMM's four elements were indeed instrumental to their mentor relationships. Moreover, TPMM employed a strength-based approach that countered deficit pedagogies. As a result, student participants learned the value of CCW and were able to further activate their aspirational and familial capital, which they possessed before participating in TPMM. Below, I outline the key findings that emerged from the lived experiences of the students participating in TPMM, but more importantly, how TPMM is critical for Latinx students enrolled in community college.

First, a key finding emerged from the usage of counterstorytelling in which all 12 peer mentor interviewees shared an alternative narrative that countered the dominant discourse as a means to engage their mentees in critical conversations. As a result, 10 mentees also told their stories in their own words that described their realities. A second key finding that emerged was the need to create physical counterspaces on campus for Students of Color to interact with each other and release the stress that often impacts their scholar identity. Further, most participants stated that the support of faculty and staff is also crucial for Students of Color to persist and have a strong sense of belonging. Thirdly, a key finding here was that need to train peer mentors in a Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring approach. All five (5) peer mentor-mentee dyads successfully fostered critical-thinking skills that stimulated action for themselves. Lastly, most peer mentors and mentees reported that aspirational and familial capital also promoted their intention to complete their educational goal.

TPMM centered the unique experiences of Latinx students and utilized Yosso's (2005) CCW framework to examine how it further supports college completion. In this study, TPMM served as a new strategy to promote college completion amongst Latinx peer mentors and mentees. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the findings and its implications, but also provide suggestions for future research. Furthermore, I will review the implications this study has for community college practitioners, research, and policy that address the completion rates of Latinx community college students in California.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study investigated which elements of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) promoted Latinx peer mentors and mentees' desire to complete their educational goals at a community college. TPMM was housed within a First-Year Experience (FYE) program at community college in Southern California, which predominantly serves Latinx students. Research shows that community college traditionally works as a primary access point to postsecondary education for Latinx students (Hagedorn et al., 2007; Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Crisp and Nuñez (2014) noted that 51% of all Latinx in the U.S. who enrolled in all segments of higher education, enrolled in two-year colleges. Although community college enrollment has increased for Latinx students, they are less likely to receive a postsecondary degree in comparison to their African-Americans, Asians, and White counterparts (Santiago, 2011). Research has shown the impact of environmental and institutional factors on Latinx college student completion.

Higher education institutions have implemented FYE programs with the goal of integrating students to the new environment, expectations and opportunities of college (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Moreover, FYE programs target low-income students with the goal of increasing their retention, persistence, and transfer rates (Knight, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). FYE is usually a one-year program that is designed to support first-year college students to achieve academic success and adjust to the college culture. However, FYE programs are designed differently at each campus. As such, some FYE programs have embedded a peer mentoring component into their design. Research has revealed how peer mentorship is an important support network that can assist students with persistence, social and

academic adjustment (Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Moschetti et al., 2017; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003; Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2017).

Despite the evidence of the positive impact of mentoring, there has been little research done on mentor programs that focus on community college students (Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Schueths & Carranza, 2012). Few studies have examined peer mentor models that specifically target Latinx community college students. In fact, mentoring may be a viable means of supporting Latinx students because it can promote their academic success while recognizing their values and experiences (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Rios-Ellis et al. 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Given that Latinx students are more likely to enroll at community college, it is critical to learn how a mentor model, such as TPMM, can support their completion goals. Further, less research has been devoted to explore the impact that mentoring has on the actual peer mentor.

The goal of this study was two-fold. First, I identified which elements of TPMM were most meaningful for both peer mentors and mentees. Then, I identified which forms of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) peer mentors and mentees brought to TPMM. Therefore, I utilized a qualitative study approach because the students' narratives were central to determine if TPMM impacted their desire to complete their educational goal. I coordinated two focus groups that resulted in 12 participants—7 peer mentors and 5 mentees. Focus groups were facilitated by two Queta College staff. After, I facilitated 10 semi-structured interviews with peer mentor-mentee dyads, but each was interviewed separately. Therefore, a total of 22 TPMM students participated in this study via focus groups and semi-structured interviews. It is important to note that focus group participants were not part of the semi-structured dyad interviews. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain in-depth information about the

students' perception of TPMM that also allowed me to edit my semi-structure interview protocols. All interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed. I carefully examined transcriptions to determine data codes.

This study was guided Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework. However, the findings have a particular focus on aspirational and familial wealth. Four key themes emerged and were discussed in the previous chapter. The CCW framework allowed me to study TPMM from a strength-based approach that helped me understand how TPMM elements contributed to the peer mentors' and mentees' college completion. The CCW framework also helped me specifically examine the role of aspirational and familial wealth within the peer mentor-mentee dyad relationships. I first summarize the key findings and discuss how the literature support the findings. Second, I review the implications that the findings may have for practice and future research. I then review the study's limitations. I conclude with a personal reflection on the significance of my study and my action plan to disseminate this information to a broader audience.

Summary of Findings

Four themes emerged from my data analysis. The themes collectively were derived from the Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM). This study allowed me to observe how Latinx community college students responded to each TPMM element. The TPMM's elements included (a) use of counterstorytelling for empowerment, (b) creation of counterspaces, (c) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgment of students' CCW. Findings revealed that all 22 participants (includes focus groups and semi-structured interviews) struggled during their first year of college. All study participants also self-identified as first-generation college students. This is critical given that first-generation college students are more

likely to stop their education after the first year (Moschetti et al., 2017; Torres & Hernandez, 2009).

In particular, first-generation Latinx college students are more likely to leave college altogether in comparison to other first-generation students (Nuñez, 2011). However, TPMM offered an approach that supported Latinx first-year students that attributed to mentees' persistence. Furthermore, findings also indicated that peer mentor participants also benefitted from the TPMM experience. The study results are aligned with previous research on Latinx college students who engage in mentorship (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Crisp, 2010; Moschetti et al., 2017; Phinney et al., 2011; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Torres Campos et al., 2009; Torres & Hernandez, 2009; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In the following four sections, I review the study results and literature.

Counterstorytelling for Empowerment

TPMM's findings suggest that counterstorytelling was a powerful tool that allowed peer mentors and mentees to speak about their lived-experiences. Utilizing counterstorytelling honored students lived-experiences and culture. Peer mentors and mentees offered an alternative narrative that disrupted the dominant discourse. Counterstories are framed by the tenets of CRT and functions in at least four modes. Counterstories have the ability to: (a) build community among those at the margins, (b) challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center, (c) nurture community CCW, and (d) facilitate transformation in education (Yosso, 2006). Peer mentor participants shared with their mentees how and why they persisted with their educational goals despite confronting many barriers. TPMM participants addressed the many environmental and institutional barriers they had to overcome.

The counterstories depicted in this study were told by Latinx students who enrolled in the community college sector. Their stories of academic persistence and resilience are critical because often they are overlooked. Students learned to navigate an educational system that was not intended for them to succeed. Their stories highlighted the many challenges—academic and personal—that come with being a Latinx first-generation college student. In particular, most study participants vocalized how they struggled with the completion of the math sequence. Developmental courses are designed to support students as they advance through the sequence, which leads to completion (Solórzano et al., 2013). However, research shows that students who initially enroll into lower-level developmental courses are less likely to complete the coursework sequence (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Melguizo, Kosiewicz, Prather, & Bos, 2014).

Further, research indicates that Latinx students who begin in the lowest developmental math course are more likely to struggle advancing through the sequence (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2013). Not advancing or completing the math sequence may determine a student's community college persistence and completion. In this study, 22 participants demonstrated a strong desire to transfer to a four-year institution. Yet, 17 of those 22 students stated that they were initially placed into a development math and faced many difficulties in passing the sequence. The participants' stories often began with how their math experience embedded deficit practices that affected their scholar identity. Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015) found that Students of Color are more likely to succeed in developmental courses when they are engaged in an environment that is validating. In this study, when mentees expressed frustration with math, peer mentors not only validate their mentees' academic experiences, but also humanized their existence.

It was evident that peer mentors connected their lived-experience with mentees' in an effort to enhance aspirational capital. In doing so, peer mentors allowed their mentees to reflect and challenge how they viewed their own academic abilities. In fact, when peer mentors shared their counterstories with their mentees, they engaged in conversations about how they strategically navigated their first year of college. First-year college students, especially Latinx students, greatly benefit from peer support as they adjust to the college life (Alcocer & Martinez, 2017). Research highlights how mentoring Latinx first-generation college students provides them with access to information that otherwise they would have not known (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). In this study, eight of the mentee participants (from focus groups and semi-structured interviews) stated that they had never experienced peer mentorship in their educational paths. The findings suggest that because peer mentors offered support by sharing their own stories of resilience; mentees were able to connect to their peer mentors and reframe their narrative to one of empowerment. More importantly, as peer mentors and mentees engaged in the mentoring relationship, they were able to build community and create counterspaces of resistance.

Creation of Counterspaces

TPMM participants shared a counterstory that illustrated how they often felt academic isolation. The counterstories demonstrated how peer mentors and mentees spoke about their many struggles that ultimately resulted in their creating academic and social counterspaces (Solórzano et al., 2000). A key finding in this study highlighted the importance of how TPMM students created counterspaces as a way to challenge the dominant narrative, but also to strengthen their sense of belonging. TPMM students formed counterspaces as a way to connect with each other, as well as to create a personal and professional sense of community in and out

of the academic setting. Findings suggest that TPMM contributed to a positive learning culture and an increased connection to the college. This is a critical finding given that Latinx students show lower levels of sense of belonging when compared to their White counterparts (Lamont Strayhorn, 2008).

Although the literature has shown the importance of counterspaces for Students of Color, the findings here demonstrated that TPMM provided the space for students to meet other Latinx students with similar experiences that was critical for their academic transition. Consistent with research is that all mentee participants expressed a strong sense of support from their peer mentors in part due to their similar backgrounds and lived-experiences (Nuñez, 2011; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Sáenz et al., 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). The mentoring relationships proved to be a counterspace for Latinx students, which supported their academic success and resulted in persistence. In fact, from 10 mentee participants, nine persisted from fall-to-spring term. One mentee participant struggled with balancing family obligations, however, she intends to re-enroll in fall 2019. Research shows that family responsibilities affect Latina women's college experience (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Sy & Romero, 2008). Another relevant piece of data is that from twelve peer mentor participants (from focus groups and semi-structured interviews), three will transfer to a four-year university in fall 2019.

It is evident that Latinx students benefit from a campus that fosters a sense of belonging since it correlates with their academic success. (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Tinto, 1993). In this study, students described how professors oftentimes engaged in deficit pedagogies. However, TPMM utilized a strength-based approach that affirmed students lived-experiences and cultural needs. For example, TPPM trainings and activities were reflective of students lived-experiences. Consistent with research is that TPMM facilitated students sense of belonging at Queta College

and also consistently validated students (Rendón, 2002; Salas et al., 2014). Research has explored how students who perceive connectedness to the campus and also feel cared about has an impact on their overall well-being (Moschetti et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). This finding is key since participants expressed how FYE staff, including TPMM coordinators, created meaningful relationships with students. This study also highlights how support and validation from staff influences how students view the college (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005) and their intention to persist (Tovar, 2015).

First-generation Latinx college students who maintain a close bond to their family and community as they create new support systems with peers and faculty increase their sense of belonging and academic success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Yosso, 2006). This study proposes how mentoring model, such as TPMM, can further support Latinx community college students to navigate college structures and systems as they create community with each other. The study found that participants engaged in different modes of counterspaces, such as within the mentoring dyads, TPMM-related activities inside and outside the academic setting, and within the FYE office that included staff interactions. More importantly, findings emphasize how students created counterspaces that allowed them to share resources and knowledge when they felt self-doubt or experienced deficit practices. A unique application here is how the mentoring relationships that students created within TPMM also proved to be reciprocal.

Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring

TPMM enabled the use of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring (Jain & Solórzano, 2015). The role of the peer mentor was to be a facilitator rather than the expert who imposed solutions on their mentees. Freire (1970) centered learning is a reflective approach where students are seen as passive learners and are not able to think critically. TPMM valued a collaborative

approach that allowed the peer mentor and mentee to build a reciprocal relationship. A finding supported by the literature is that peer mentors did not engage in the traditional form of mentoring; rather mentees were also active participants, as research supports (Jain & Solórzano, 2015). The findings indicate that peer mentors engaged their mentees in critical thinking and dialogue that led to action.

The findings support Freire's Problem-Posing framework since peer mentors prompted their mentees to think about their conditions and their place in society in an effort to transform their realities along with their community. In fact, this approach became a transformation process for the peer mentor-mentee dyads that resulted in emancipatory learning (Freire, 1970; Jain & Solórzano, 2015).

With a Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring approach, peer mentors were able to challenge their mentees to make connections on how education reproduces oppressive conditions for Students of Color. They did this in a unique way by sharing the knowledge and tools they had gained in TPMM trainings. TPMM recognized that Latinx students are more likely to feel empowered when they understand policies, practices, and systems surrounding their environment (Salas et al., 2014). Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring allowed students to engage in a continual cycle of reflection and action. In fact, findings show that with the implementation of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring participants expressed an increased desire to change their communities. Peer mentors asked their mentees to think beyond their participation in TPMM and look at education as a structure that oftentimes dehumanizes Students of Color. As co-learners, peer mentors and mentees activated their critical thinking skills and began to question Queta College systems and structures. My findings correlate with the Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring approach since students expressed a desire to complete their educational goals in an

effort to create change in their community. In the next sub-section, I discuss how Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) functioned in promoting community college completion.

Acknowledgment of Community Cultural Wealth

Utilizing the CCW framework allowed TPMM to capture the lived-experiences of Latinx students. The findings demonstrate how most of participants used their aspirational and familial capital towards completing their academic goals. In fact, one key finding revealed that through TPMM training all peer mentor participants expressed how learning about Yosso's (2005) CCW framework allowed them not only to assess their most salient capital, but their mentees' as well.

Aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) defined CCW as an “array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77). TPMM acknowledged that participants arrived at college with aspirational capital. Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). It is evident that students had to overcome many institutional and environmental barriers in order to persist in the community college system. Still, students expressed a strong commitment to completing their educational goals, which included transferring to a four-year university. Findings revealed that peer mentors nurtured their mentees' dreams because they provided them with the necessary tools and knowledge that made them feel more integrated to Queta College (Moschetti et al., 2017). Further, mentees observed how their peer mentors created a compassionate culture in which they had someone to turn to for emotional and academic support (Moschetti et al., 2017). For example, TPMM trained peer mentors to assess their mentees'

personal and academic needs (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). As a result, mentees felt acknowledged and their aspirational capital increased.

Furthermore, as peer mentors validated their mentees' aspirations, they were also able to transform their own "hopes and dreams" into a reality. Unlike other programs, TPMM enhanced peer mentors' aspirational capital. TPMM coordinators affirmed peer mentors' dreams and hopes, but more importantly, they worked together to ensure they met their academic goals. Unique to this study was the reciprocal effect on mentors. Another key finding here was that nine of ten mentees expressed an interest in becoming a TPMM peer mentor for the 2019–2020 academic year. Findings indicate that the mentees understand the importance of mentoring and the impact it can have on Latinx students. This is evidence that mentees' aspirational capital was enhanced in a unique way, since they have a desire to give back to their TPMM community. TPMM used aspirational capital as a way to "nurture a culture of possibility" for the students, which was also supported by their own families (Yosso, 2005, p.77).

Familial capital. TPMM acknowledged and contributed to students' familial capital. Yosso (2005) defined familial capital as "cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). TPPM participants consistently highlighted how they pulled from their familial capital to maintain motivation in order to persist (Burciaga & Eberstein, 2013; Zalaquett, 2005). TPMM did not view parents with a deficit lens. Rather, it acknowledged how parents actively supported their children's aspirations even though they had limited knowledge regarding the college process. Findings reveal that most participants grew up in a household where education was valued. This unique program drew on that asset and assisted parents in supporting their children.

This study is consistent with the literature that finds Latinx parents have high educational expectations for their children and stress the importance of education (Luna & Martinez, 2013; Zalaquett, 2005; Zell, 2010). In fact, participants expressed how their parents expected them to attend college and invested in their education in different ways. Research has shown that Latinx parental support looks different from the mainstream educational process (Araque, Wietstock, Cova, & Zepeda, 2017, Marschall, 2006). In this study, parental involvement was seen in attending or volunteering at school-related events, paying for extra-curricular activities, lessening family obligations, and/or providing emotional support. In particular, findings suggest that participants acknowledged how their parents were a main source of motivation (Marrero, 2016; Zalaquett, 2005). Such evidence goes against research that views Latinx parents from a deficit perspective.

This unique program drew on how parents are assets, therefore, TPMM assisted students by providing them with a sense of family on campus. Familial capital also extended beyond the family dynamics. Findings also indicate that peer mentors and mentees viewed their relationship to be more than a formal interaction on campus. Since the peer mentor offered support and advice (*consejos*) that came from their own experiences as college students, they were able to contribute to their mentee's scholar identity and enhance their sense of community at Queta College. As a result, students recognized that they were both part of each other's family circle (Yosso, 2005). As such, students maintained a strong line of communication and attended campus events together. More importantly, students celebrated each other's success and collaborated towards boosting Latinx educational achievement (Murakami & Núñez, 2014). Furthermore, TPMM created an environment that allowed students to feel validated and they also perceived the FYE as a second home (Salas et al., 2014). Overall, findings demonstrate how

Yosso's (2005) CCW model not only supported the mentoring relationship, but promoted academic success.

Implications of Findings

This study described the impact and development of the new Transformative Peer Mentor Model (also known as TPMM) that supported Latinx community college students. TPMM was created to highlight the lived-experiences of Latinx community college students and understand how its elements functioned within the mentoring relationship. TPMM was further grounded in the CCW framework since students enhanced their mentoring experience with the sharing of each other's capital. The study might be useful for all sectors of higher education that want to implement or enhance their mentoring program with intentions to increase retention and persistence among Students of Color.

Key findings revealed that mentee participants were satisfied with TPMM's core elements: (a) use of counterstorytelling, (b) creation of counterspaces by students, (c) Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (d) acknowledgement of students' CCW. Specifically, results prove to be relevant since there is an immediate call to aid the completion crisis for Latinx students attending the two-year colleges throughout California. The findings here have the ability to inform the work of other mentor programs that are looking for an approach that embeds social justice practices to support Latinx students. Furthermore, the findings also offer an insight on the aspects that contribute or deter Latinx students from completing their educational goal at a two-year college. In what follows, I outline how educational leaders can utilize my findings to promote community college completion amongst Latinx students. Moreover, my study will inform research and theory because it placed special attention on the lived-experiences of Latinx students who participated in TPMM and their intention on college completion.

Implications for Practice

The study prompts practitioners in higher education to critically reflect on the experiences of Latinx community college students and how their needs are different from those students attending four-year universities. In particular, some of the participants shared how they had anticipated enrolling at a four-year institution, but mostly due to financial barriers, they enrolled at Queta College. Practitioners might consider how mentoring could mediate the effects such a decision has specifically on Latinx “reverse transfers” and their intent to complete. A second implication for practitioners is their ability to create an environment that welcomes and validates Latinx students—with culturally relevant programming that centers Latinx resilience and honors lived-experiences.

Findings here were consistent with the literature that Latinx students who are mentored are more likely to integrate into the college setting and are less prone to leave college. However, most institutions do not have the capacity to institutionalize mentor programs that could potentially match all first-year students with a peer mentor due to cost. In this study, the peer mentors volunteered for one-academic year. Peer mentors attended roughly 20 hours of training, which did not include the time they devoted to actual mentoring. TPMM proved to be effective as a volunteer opportunity, but an implication for educators to note is the difficulty of obtaining funding to sustain the programming pieces and hiring of appropriate staffing. In order to institutionalize such a mentor model and expand its services to more students, colleges need to be equipped with proper staffing and resources. Therefore, because Latinx first-generation college students need proactive support, educational leaders must provide proper staffing to engage students on more personalized manner.

Another implication might include training faculty and staff to apply a TPMM approach as they interact with students. However, academic counselors have a key role in students' educational trajectories. Students will meet with a counselor to develop an educational plan at least once during their college experience. Therefore, counselors could maximize student support if they (a) create a nurturing space that listen and validates students' experiences, (b) encourage dialogue and critical thinking, (c) refrain from deficit notions, and (d) recognize the students' CCW while sharing their own. This is relevant given that sometimes a lack of cultural awareness or a deficit counseling practice becomes the main institutional barrier for Latinx students.

The final implication allows educational leaders who might have a peer mentor model in place to reflect on their current approach as it relates to training and reevaluating implementation. Practitioners could inform their work by adapting TPMM in which they implement all four of its elements, add other elements, or perhaps select the elements most relevant to their student needs. Also, with TPMM training, peer mentors could examine their mentor practices and understand the important connection between mentoring Students of Color and college completion. Relevant to practitioners as well relates to the idea of compensating students who participate as peer mentors. Mentoring has shown to have an impact on the actual peer mentor's retention, personal development, and professional training. Practitioners should consider that these student-mentors also have particular socioeconomic circumstances and would benefit greatly from financial support. If peer mentors are not being compensated, perhaps educational leaders might consider stipends, applying to grants, or collaborating with the Financial Aid office to coordinate Federal Work-Study as an option.

The final implication relates to the new AB 705 California state mandate, also known as Multiple Measures. AB 705 requires community colleges to increase the likelihood of students completing transfer-level coursework in math and English within one year. Rather than students taking a placement exam, community college districts can use students' high school coursework, grades, and GPA to determine placement. AB 705 is a promising initiative because it properly places students in math and English since placement exams are seldom the best indicators of student academic abilities in those two subjects.

Many TPMM students expressed concern about their math placement and the time they will have to spend (or have spent) to complete the math sequence. Although TPMM is still developing, the initial findings are indicative that mentoring played an important role in mentees' math confidence and integration to Queta College. Educational leaders might consider mentoring practices that focus on student academic development to ensure that they complete math or English in one year.

Implications for Research and Theory

Research typically focuses on the mentoring experiences of four-year university students, but this study introduced ways in which TPMM promoted Latinx students' desire to complete community college. The study's findings provide several implications to consider for future research. Looking specifically at Latinx community college students is important because it provides an understanding on how mentoring might have an influence on student retention, persistence, completion, and transfer path. Future research could examine a larger sample size and use a mixed methods approach to show how TPMM supports Latinx community college students.

Current research highlights the impact mentoring has on the mentee. However, there is a gap in the literature in regards to the experiences and impact mentoring has on the peer mentor's development and persistence. TPPM findings might encourage researchers to specifically examine the experiences of Latinx peer mentors specifically attending two-year colleges. Future research could explore the effects of how mentoring others might impact student's major and/or career choice with a longitudinal study. Furthermore, the findings revealed that TPMM training module had a positive effect on peer mentors' personal and professional development.

This study also highlighted that importance of having a robust training module that builds on students' strengths, engages them in a reflective practice, and provides continuous support. However, little is known about the development and implementation of training modules that not only target Students of Color, but embed a social justice lens. My study findings also serve as a pathway to examine mentor models that target specific populations, such Latinx in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), undocumented and LGBTQIA+ students; or other marginalized identities. Here, researchers can observe the intersectional identities that students bring to academia and how these may impact their intention to complete community college.

A final implication relates to the utility of theory in studying peer mentor models. First, research might consider how spiritual capital (Perez Huber, 2009), the seventh form of CCW, functions as a critical vein for students' educational experience. Spiritual capital instills a sense of faith and hope for students because it includes "religious, indigenous, and ancestral beliefs and practices learned from one's family, community, and inner self" (Perez Huber, 2009). Second, although this study was guided by CCW and CRT, research could use Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to guide future studies. LatCrit theory "examines the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses

that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 479). LatCrit emphasizes the experiences of Latinx while uncovering additional forms of discrimination, such as how immigration status impacts student success (Perez Huber, 2009). LatCrit might be appropriate when studying mentor model that target Latinx students because in this study, participants repeatedly expressed how legal status negatively impacted their educational experience.

Limitations

Several limitations surfaced with the research process. First, my findings cannot be generalized beyond the study site due to the small sample size (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). A larger sample size would result in more precise analysis of the effects mentoring has on students’ intent to complete college. Further, I studied a specific sample from a two-year college in Southern California that is classified as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). The results may not be relevant to institutions that are four-year, private, or not classified as HSI. The study did not involve other racially minoritized students, such as African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Even though the results cannot be generalized, my study could be replicated to serve diverse student populations in various higher education settings, with careful adaptation.

Third, as the researcher, I have to acknowledge that I did not disaggregate the Latinx students by national origin. This is a limitation because Latinx peoples are inherently diverse in language and racial identity. For example, people who identify as Afro-Latinx or Indigenous have different lived-experiences. Therefore, disaggregating data for Latinx students is important to examine the different inequities and/or educational experiences that hinder their academic success. Lastly, I have to recognize the potential of my own bias as a limitation in this study. As

the researcher and main facilitator of TPMM, I ensured that my biases were reduced by consulting with colleagues (Creswell, 2014) and consistently reflecting on my position. Rather, my educational experiences allowed me to understand students because I, too, was a transfer student and navigated many challenges.

Strategies to Replicate TPMM

TPMM has the capability to enhance student support programs and further support Students of Color enrolled in a community college. First, in an effort to support models such as TPMM; it is imperative for educational leaders to hire coordinators who will devote the time needed to execute all pieces of programming. The second step entails the recruitment and selection of peer mentors who will commit to the vision of the mentor model. I am confident that mentoring can have a positive impact, on both peer mentors and mentees, when the program is structured and meaningful to the student experience. Thus, mentor training is crucial. Mentor training must be intentional and consistent so peer mentors feel supported, but are also assessed during the entire process. Selecting peer mentors with prior experience is helpful, but not required. In fact, TPMM coordinators selected students who showed potential and were open to learning more about social justice practices and new frameworks relating to student development. The training topics are essential to the personal and professional growth of the peer mentor, which in turn will be shared with their mentee. Program coordinators should create a curriculum that best serves the needs of their student population.

As previously mentioned, TPMM's elements worked well together at Queta College. However, coordinators might consider building on TPMM elements or using the elements most relevant to their students' needs. The curriculum should align activities and essential questions with assessment to ensure student learning. Another important strategy is the need for program

coordinators to meet with peer mentors and mentees to discuss topics that are relevant to the student, such as academics, personal, professional, or social matters. FYE coordinators were intentional about building and nourishing student relationships, which proved to be crucial for the success of TPMM. Communication was strong between all parties and supported the structure of the program. An effective student tracking system is also useful because it contains student personal information, meeting notes, GPA, etc. that is aligned with interventions to help students persist. Furthermore, program coordinators should create a program manual that outlines the program's mission and goals, policy and procedures, training objectives, mentor/mentee expectations, campus resources, etc.

Lastly, funding is needed to execute a successful program. However, if funding is limited, coordinators should seek on-campus partnerships or federal grants to implement, enhance, or sustain the mentor program. Funding should also account for social activities that allow students to interact with each other, but also feel a greater sense of belonging at their college. Implementing a successful peer mentor program requires time and constant evaluation. Consequently, educational leaders must provide proper resources to promote program development, and remember that with time their program will demonstrate effectiveness.

Reflection and Call for Action

Mentoring has been an essential part of my identity. I did not realize it, but mentoring, for me, began with my *Abuela's* [grandmother] validation and wisdom. My *Abuela* instilled in me her spiritual capital that was necessary when I doubted my professional and academic abilities. There was a time when I questioned my passion and almost left the field of education altogether. My *Abuela* believed in me more than anyone else, including myself. Her mentoring has supported my academic and professional success. Further, I have also been fortunate to have

a support system outside my family circle. I also attribute my academic success to my mentor, whom I have known now for 18 years.

When I reached my senior year in high school, I did not know how to get to college, but I knew I would get there no matter what. In fact, I was confident that one day I would attend the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). It was not until I met that young woman who not only saw a lost first-year college student, but also noticed something special in me. She saw my true potential and took me under her guidance. Through her mentorship, I have been able to accomplish many academic goals, including transferring from the California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) to the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Although UCSB help shape me into the person I am today, the college transition was difficult. This is where I learned what the imposter syndrome felt like.

I, too, have a counterstory to share, and I believe this is one reason I relate and strongly connect to my students. Their lives are a reflection of my own experiences. I have learned so much from my students that they motivate to persist in my own educational trajectory. Oftentimes, my students have become my mentors. Now that I have the ability to mentor, I provide my students (former and current) with the safe-space to tell me their stories. We work alongside so we can change their realities and that of our communities. My students and I have critical conversations that go beyond academics, as their stories are oftentimes full of trauma. However, I continuously practice mindful listening, validate them, and point out their strengths and resilience so they can see what they are truly made of.

In particular, my advising approach shifted when I began working with Women of Color pursuing STEM careers at a private university. Although I did not have a name for my holistic approach then, now I know that TPPM has been central to my practice. I see my students'

aspirations and the sacrifice that come with pursuing a college degree. However, I do believe that with peer mentoring, obstacles can be removed for peer mentors and mentees alike. Educational structures are sometimes major obstacles for Students of Color, therefore, having a program in place that supports their academic and professional goals is critical. It is my personal mission to bring attention to my students' resilient stories and call to action for community colleges to prioritize peer mentor models that support Students of Color. In fact, earlier this year I applied for a grant and received funding that will allow me to enhance programming in the 2019–2020 academic year. For example, I will be able to compensate peer mentors for their work and bring outside consultants who are experts in their fields to train students and staff. I will continue to promote peer mentoring as part of Queta College's institutional culture.

I will continue to advocate for my students and, therefore, present my research findings at my workplace, national conferences, and of course, with future TPMM participants, in hopes to inspire change. Latinx community college students are often seen from a deficit perspective. However, I will continue to counter such notions and highlight how much Community Cultural Wealth they bring to academia. As my mentor says, “for our students, education is a matter of life or death.” I am confident that together, my students and I will change the trajectories of Latinx students.

APPENDIX A: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that is used in various fields of study that centers race to understand how race and racism impacts social interactions, structures and practices experienced by People of Color (Yosso, 2006). The five tenants are as follows:

- *Intercentricity of race and racism*—CRT centralizes race and racism while focusing on the intersections of racism with other forms of subordination (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 91).
- *Challenge of dominant ideology*—CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Yosso, 2006, p. 73).
- *Commitment to social justice*—CRT scholars envision a social justice agenda that leads toward the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and the empowering of underrepresented minorities (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 313).
- *Centrality of experiential knowledge*—CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Students of Color are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 314). CRT draws explicitly on the lived experiences of Students of Color with the usage storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, testimonies, chronicles, and narratives (Yosso, 2006).
- *Interdisciplinary perspective*—CRT draws from the strengths of multiple disciplines, epistemologies, and research approaches (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 91).

APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

According to Yosso (2006), “community cultural wealth [is] a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital. These are follows:

- *Aspirational capital* – the ability for students to maintain their “hopes and dreams” despite the perceived barriers they encounter (p. 77).
- *Linguistic capital* – reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills (p. 78).
- *Familial capital* – refers to the strong commitment to family and community students already possess (p. 79).
- *Social capital* – includes students’ network of “peers and other social contacts” use to navigate through society’s institutions (p. 79)
- *Navigational capital* – Students of Color have abilities and skillset to navigate “social institutions,” including academic spaces (p. 80).
- *Resistance capital* – refers to the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequities (p. 80).

APPENDIX C: TRANSFORMATIVE PEER MENTOR MODEL: CORE ELEMENTS

The proposed Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) consisted of four key elements that embed social justice practices. The elements are the: (1) usage of counterstorytelling, (2) creation of counterspaces by students, (3) practice of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring, and (4) acknowledgment of students' Community Cultural Wealth. The four elements are highlighted in detail in the next sections, however, I first review the importance of embedding social justice practices.

In order for educational transformation to occur, social justice practices must address the needs of Latinx students so they complete their educational goal. TPMM asked the mentor to continually reflect, challenge, change, and evaluate their practice to create transformative spaces for them to harness their potential (Neville, 2015). Peer mentors who embraced TPMM, learned the core conditions of social justice practices because it serves as the guiding principle of their work (Neville, 2015). A training centered in social justice practices allowed the peer mentor to reach their own critical consciousness.

Additionally, the peer mentor developed an informed awareness of the oppressive social elements in their environment with the hope that they challenge these conditions (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Freire, 1970; Neville, 2015). For example, TPMM deconstructed mentors' internalized stigmas and directed them to a strength-based approach and they recognized that they already possess assets and skillsets to succeed (Albright et al., 2017; Yosso, 2006). The peer mentors' practice was a journey of self-discovery as they moved towards a critical conscious ideology (Neville, 2015).

Through reflection, peer mentors shared their lived-experiences as a fundamental reminder of where they have been, what obstacles and talents propelled them to persist, and what

actions they must take to complete their educational goal as they continue to grow along the continuum of critical consciousness. This approach placed value on Latinx peer mentor lived-experiences that are often erased in the context of academic pressures to conform and adhere to dominant ways of knowing (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015). In turn, the peer mentor used a similar practice in their mentoring relationships. Therefore, peer mentors shared their stories while providing the space for mentees to feel comfortable in sharing their lived-experiences. Given the importance of social justice practices, what follows are the four elements that comprise the TPMM.

Power of Counterstorytelling

Through counterstorytelling, the student's lived experiences are acknowledged, humanized, which in turns empowers them to construct a new reality (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counterstorytelling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 26). With the application of counterstorytelling, TPMM attempted to reactivate the personal and community assets of Latinx peer mentors and provide them with strategies to develop personal power (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015). Both, peer mentors and their mentees, utilized their stories (*testimonios*) as a tool to reframe their notion of schooling from deficit to that of empowerment.

Because counterstorytelling aligns with Critical Race Theory (CRT), peer mentors will learn to challenge mainstream assumptions that are placed on them as Latinx community college students. For example, capturing counterstories is a tool in mentoring because, with a critical lens, peer mentors and mentees will identify negative experiences they have endured, such as deficit practices and microaggressions, within academic spaces while they empower themselves to resist inequities, and are motivated to improve educational opportunities for Students of Color

(Burciaga & Erbstein , 2013). The sharing of stories serves as a powerful function in the TPMM because it gives peer mentors and mentees a voice to be validated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The following section describes the next element in the TPMM, which is the creation of counterspaces by peer mentors and mentees.

TPMM as a Counterspaces

With the usage of counterstorytelling, a peer mentor program also has the capability to transform into a counterspace of resistance. Research has proven that mentoring has an influence on academic and social integration into the campus community, in particular, for Latinx students' persistence (Tinto, 1993). Given that Latinx students who reported perceptions of more hostile climates exhibited lower levels of sense of belonging in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), it is critical for students to create a sense of belonging when it is not provided for them. To resist microaggressions and the underlying racism, Latinx students often create academic and social counterspaces where they build a culturally supportive and affirming community. This might include participating in Latinx student organizations or enrolling in Chicana/o studies courses, which function as transformative sites of resistance (Nuñez, 2011; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Benavides López, 2010).

Through this social-justice based training, peer mentors and mentees who participated in TPMM began to enhance their critical consciousness and created counterspaces to promote a strength-based culture, challenged the dominant narrative, and built positive networks towards college completion. TPMM served as a counterspace so peer mentors and mentees cultivate a sense of belonging, confidence, validation, and persistence. In addition, during TPMM training peer mentors learned the mechanisms to combat cultural isolation and negative stereotypes while developing their personal identity in relation to their family and communities (Solórzano et al.,

2000). Peer mentors shared with their mentees the knowledge and tools they gained during TPMM training, which enabled them to create positive experiences and interactions that strengthened their commitment to the campus. Now that there is an understanding of the importance of creating counterspace; the next element of TPMM is the use of Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring.

Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring

To allow for counterstorytelling and the creation of counterspace to occur, I utilized Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring concept because it emphasizes the partnership between mentor and mentee as equal and liberating (Jain & Solórzano, 2015). This approach allowed the peer mentor to have a reflective and compassionate practice. Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring did not reproduce the banking concept (Freire, 1970). Instead, it created a space where students' ideas were validated and central to their intellectual growth and challenge dominant paradigms (Jain & Solórzano, 2015).

Freire (1970) defined the banking concept when students are seen as empty containers and the teacher's role is to fill them with knowledge. Implementing a Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring approach allowed the mentoring relationship to be a two-way, reflective process rather than hierarchical (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Jain & Solórzano, 2014). More importantly, Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring valued lived experiences and disrupted a deficit-thinking paradigm. The final element in TPMM was the acknowledgment of students' Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and how its function impacted their experiences on completing community college.

Acknowledgment of Community Cultural Wealth

TPMM stems from a strength-based paradigm that explores how Latinx culture has the ability to be an asset for succeeding in higher education (Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017). Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model is useful because it incorporates six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Student of Color bring an "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" to the educational setting (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Community Cultural Wealth surpasses white, middle-class culture to include a diverse context in an academic climate (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). TPMM is committed to increase Latinx community college student completion by capturing mentors' talents, strengths, and experiences (Yosso, 2006).

In addition, TPMM is a mechanism where social capital will be exchanged. Social capital is the value of a relationship that provides support and community resources that assist students to manage unfamiliar environments (Moschetti et al., 2017; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). For example, in academic settings the quality and quantity of social networks that Latinx students access may result in academic engagement and persistence (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012). This finding reinforces the importance of relationships for overall college success and adjustment (Moschetti et al., 2017). Peer mentors will access and benefit from the TPMM network to receive social and academic support, assistance on career paths, and the emotional sustenance needed to remain in college (Kiyama, Luca, & Raucci, & Crump-Owens, 2014; Moschetti et al., 2017).

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear Scholar,

My name is Sandy Chávez and I am currently a UCLA doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program (ELP). My dissertation is a study on the experiences of Latinx community college students who are currently participating in the First-Year Experience (FYE) Peer Mentor Program. I am looking for peer mentors and peer mentees to participate in my study and share their time and experience with me. The goal of my research is to understand how mentorship may have an impact on peer mentors and peer mentees' academic and future goals.

As a volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one (1) interview, which will either be in-person or via an online source called "Zoom." Interviews will be approximately 45 minutes long. You will receive a \$5 Starbucks card and lunch for your time.

Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you may choose to stop at any point. All information shared with me will be kept confidential. This information will be published and presented in a way that does not identify any specific person or school site. The purpose of this study is to develop effective student-centered programming at Queta College to promote college completion while also producing best practices for faculty and staff.

If you would like to participate in this research project, please complete the short 10-question survey here:

[TINYURL.COM/PMSTUDY2018](https://tinyurl.com/pmstudy2018)

If you meet my study's criteria, I will contact you directly and I will arrange a time and location to meet. Please note that in-person interviews may be arranged either on or off campus, and will be based on your availability and for your convenience.

Thank you in advance,

Sandy Chávez
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies Educational Leadership Program
Doctoral Candidate
Mobile: 626-731-XXXX
Email: chavez.sandy@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TPPM PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation study. This study focuses on the experiences of Latinx community college students who are currently participating in the First-Year Experience (FYE) Peer Mentor Program. I am looking for peer mentors and mentees to participate in my study who are willing to share their time and experience with me. The goal of my research is to understand how mentorship may have an impact on peer mentors and their mentees' academic and future goals. Please answer the following questions to determine if you meet my study's criteria. I, Ms. Sandy Chávez, will contact you via email and/or telephone if you are selected to participate. You will receive a lunch and gift card for your time. **Note: Your participation is strictly voluntarily and you can exit the study at any point without consequence.**

1. What is your full name and contact information?
2. What is your gender? (it's okay if you prefer not to answer; leave blank)
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Is English your first language?
 - a. If not, what language was it?
5. Are you a first-generation college student? (*your parent/guardian did not receive a four-year college degree*)
6. Do work on/off campus? If so, generally how many hours do you work per week?
 - a. 5-10 hours
 - b. 10-15 hours
 - c. 15-20 hours
 - d. 20 or more hours
7. What is your declared major? (*if you do not know, you can state undecided*)
8. What is your educational goal here at Queta College?
 - a. Associate Degree for Transfer (AA-T or AS-T)
 - b. Certificate of Achievement
 - c. Skills Certificate
 - d. Associate in Arts or an Associate in Science
 - e. Life-long Learner
 - f. Other→ Please explain
9. Are you currently a full-time or part-time student at Queta College? (*full-time students enroll in 12 or more units unless you have accommodations from EOPS*)
10. Please check only one (1) option. Are you interested in participating in the following?
 - a. 45-minute interview with Ms. Sandy Chavez (*note: your assigned peer mentor/mentee must also agree to participate in this study*)
 - b. Focus Group conversation with roughly 6-8 other peer mentors/mentees
 - c. Doing both—interview and the focus group

APPENDIX F: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY (FOCUS GROUP)

The Impact of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model on Latinx Community College Students

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study conducted by Ms. Sandy Chávez, doctoral student from the Education Leadership Program and Dr. Diane Durkin and Dr. Daniel Solórzano (Faculty Sponsors) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). You were selected as a possible participant due to your involvement with First-Year Experience's (FYE) Peer Mentor Program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. **We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to understand how the FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees' academic and future goals.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in an anonymous **focus group** interview that will be roughly one-hour long. The questions will emphasize on your experience with FYE Peer Mentor Program.
- Allow us to record the interview responses.
- Review transcript with your responses and check for accuracy and make any changes necessary.
- Attend the focus group on campus in a private location.
- You agree to release and discharge Queta College District, each of its respective trustees, agents, employees, and officers from any and all claims, losses, demands, royalties, liabilities, costs and expenses, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses, which you may have or may hereafter have by reason of your voluntary participation in this study.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

The risks or discomforts associated with this study would come from having your focus group interview recorded for the purpose of research. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. However, your interview responses will be kept anonymous. I will select a pseudonym (alias) name for you before participating in the focus group to ensure confidentiality. *There is limited risk and no discomfort anticipated for this study.*

Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participating in this study is that you will have the opportunity to share your knowledge about your experiences with the First-Year Experience Peer Mentor Program as it relates to your academic and future goals. In addition, Queta administrators will benefit from this study because they will be able to identify specific elements of the FYE Peer Mentor Program that may help increase Queta completion rates, if found to be the case, according to student interviews.

Confidentiality

This study is anonymous. This study will not collect, retain, or disclose your personally identifiable information, such as your name, address, or student ID number. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. None of your responses will be directly linked to your personal information because all interview transcripts will be stripped of identity indicators. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. The audio recordings will be reviewed by me and will also be kept confidential. They will be erased after 6 months.

I will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you. Your identity will not be disclosed in the material that is published. However, you will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material that is published about you.

Compensation

You will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card and lunch during the focus group interview.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* and your relationship with FYE Peer Mentor Program will not be affected, nor will you suffer any consequences or penalties of any kind. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process. Additionally, you have the right to request that I not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Ms. Sandy Chávez at chavez.sandy@gmail.com or by telephone at 323-780-6741. If you would like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, LA, CA 90095-1406.

The Faculty Sponsors

If you have further questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Dr. Diane Durkin at durkin@humnet.ucla.edu or Dr. Daniel Solórzano at solorzano@gseis.ucla.edu

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator, Sandy Chávez.

This document needs to be emailed back to the researcher, Sandy Chávez, before the focus group.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX G: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY (SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS)

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Impact of the Transformative Peer Mentor Model on Latinx Community College Students

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study conducted by Ms. Sandy Chávez, doctoral student from the Education Leadership Program and Dr. Diane Durkin and Dr. Daniel Solórzano (Faculty Sponsors) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). You were selected as a possible participant due to your involvement with First-Year Experience's (FYE) Peer Mentor Program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. **We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to understand how the FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees' academic and future goals.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in one (1) **interview** that will be roughly 45 minutes. The interview questions will focus on your experience with FYE Peer Mentor Program.
- Allow me to record the interview responses
- Review transcript with your responses and check for accuracy and make any changes necessary
- Interview will be scheduled according to your availability
- You agree to release and discharge the Queta Community College District, each of its respective trustees, agents, employees, and officers from any and all claims, losses, demands, royalties, liabilities, costs and expenses, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses, which you may have or may hereafter have by reason of your voluntary participation in this study

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

I will select a pseudonym (alias) name for you before participating in the focus group to ensure confidentiality. **If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please contact the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.**

Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participating in this study is that you will have the opportunity to share your knowledge about your experiences with the First-Year Experience Peer Mentor Program as it relates to your academic and future goals. In addition, Queta administrators will benefit from this study because they will be able to identify specific elements of the FYE Peer Mentor Program that help increase Queta completion rates, if found to be the case, according to student interviews.

Confidentiality

This study is anonymous. This study will not collect, retain, or disclose your personally identifiable information, such as your name, address, or student ID number. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. None of your responses will be directly linked to your personal information because all interview transcripts will be stripped of identity indicators. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. The audio recordings will be reviewed by me and will also be kept confidential. They will be erased after 6 months. I will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify

you. Your identity will not be disclosed in the material that is published. However, you will be given the opportunity to review and approve any material that is published about you.

Compensation

You will receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card and snacks during the interview.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* and your relationship with FYE Peer Mentor Program will not be affected, nor will you suffer any consequences or penalties of any kind. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process. Additionally, you have the right to request that I not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Ms. Sandy Chávez at chavez.sandy@gmail.com or by telephone at 323-780-6741. If you would like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP)**:

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, LA, CA 90095-1406

The Faculty Sponsors

If you have further questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Dr. Diane Durkin at durkin@humnet.ucla.edu or Dr. Daniel Solórzano at solorzano@gseis.ucla.edu

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You also agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator, Sandy Chávez.

This document needs to be emailed back to the researcher, Sandy Chávez, before the interview.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX H: TPMM TRAINING MODULE

Focus of TPMM Training	Guiding Questions	Pedagogical Strategies & Assignments
<p>Session #1 Understanding FYE & TPMM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will create community agreements to establish a safe environment. • Participants will learn the importance of FYE and TPMM. • Participants will learn about the Queta College's Scorecard and begin to connect statistics to importance of mentoring Students of Color. • Participants will identify the institutional & environmental barriers that impact Queta student success. • Participants will reflect and create their Educational Road Maps. 	<p>What is FYE?</p> <p>Why mentor for FYE?</p> <p>Why is mentoring critical for Students of Color?</p> <p>What is TPMM?</p> <p>What is your purpose in TPMM?</p> <p>What strengths are you bringing to FYE and TPMM?</p>	<p>1. Community Building Activity (musical chairs)</p> <p>2. Review FYE's and TPMM's Mission Statement</p> <p>3. College Profile & Scorecard</p> <p>4. "Activity: How does a FYE student look like?"</p> <p>5. What strengths do you bring to TPMM? (group discussion)</p> <p>Homework:</p> <p>1. Read Yosso's (2005) CCW & reflect on your own CCW</p> <p>2. Create Educational Road Map that points key moments that have had a positive and/or negative impact on your scholar identity</p>
<p>Session #2 Mentoring for Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will engage in critical conversations to discuss why Community Cultural Wealth is embedded in TPMM. • Participants will understand the 	<p>What is the difference between capital and wealth?</p> <p>What is your CCW?</p> <p>What type of CCW do you think your mentee will bring to TPMM?</p> <p>What are some CCW that are not valued in education?</p>	<p>1. About the Author (Dr. Tara Yosso)</p> <p>2. Discuss Yosso's reading and guiding questions in groups</p> <p>3. Review Bourdieu's Social & Culture Capital</p> <p>4. Educational Road Map reflection as group (identify deficit practices)</p>

<p>difference between capital and wealth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will challenge Pierre Bourdieu's social capital to understand the concept of Cultural Capital. • Participants will learn the term deficit thinking and analyze how this perspective shapes their educational pathways. 	<p>What are deficit practices?</p> <p>How will you, as the Peer Mentor, ensure that your mentee's CCW is validated?</p>	<p>5. Assessing your own CCW (activity prior to create "CCW Tree")</p> <p>Homework: 1. Read Paulo Freire's Chapter 2 and take notes</p>
<p>Session #3 Mentoring for Power (continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will learn the concept of education as framed by Paulo Freire • Participants will analyze the concept of Banking Method and Problem-Posing Model in relation to the Peer Mentoring Model. • Participants will connect the Freirean concepts and relate them to their lived experiences to have a further understanding of their educational journeys. • Participants will learn Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring • Participants will understand and critique the concepts of equity and equality in relation to their 	<p>What is Education? (Freire)</p> <p>What is the Banking Method?</p> <p>What is Problem-Posing Model?</p> <p>Have you experienced "Banking Education" and if so, at what point in your journey?</p> <p>How has your lived experience with "Banking Education" impacted your scholar identity?</p> <p>What is Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring?</p> <p>What is the difference between equity and equality?</p>	<p>1. About the Author (Paulo Freire)</p> <p>2. Discuss Freire's reading</p> <p>3. Banking Education reflection</p> <p>4. Group dialogue on how Freirean Problem-Posing Mentoring looks like in TPMM</p> <p>Homework: 1. Read "The Four Agreements" and connect it with your mentor practice</p>

educational trajectories.		
Session #4 Mentor-Mentee Meet & Greet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will participate in a <i>Meet and Greet</i> that introduces the mentor dyads. Participants will engage and reflect on our invited keynote's counterstory Mentor participants will learn the framework of "The Four Agreements" as part of building and nourishing the mentoring relationship. Participants develop relationship boundaries to ensure a mentor/mentee practice that is respectful and maintains all participants' dignity and humanity. 	<p>How will you use the four agreements to enhance your mentor practice?</p> <p>What boundaries will you create with your mentor/mentee?</p> <p>What is the role of peer mentor and mentee in TPMM?</p>	<p>1. Case scenarios using "The Four Agreements" to come up with solutions</p> <p>2. Create one SMART goal with your mentee</p> <p>3. Complete & submit the Communication Agreement Form</p>
Session #5 The Importance of Time Management as Campus Leaders <i>(Invited Guest Speaker)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will learn the importance of time management as part of their mentor/mentee relationships. Participants will identify the varying layers of time management, 	<p>How have you been incorporating your mentee in your schedule?</p> <p>How does it look like, and is it working for or against you?</p> <p>How much time are you spending on academics?</p> <p>Are you being productive with your time?</p>	<p>1. Reflection and group dialogue</p> <p>2. Create a time management plan via the worksheet (168 Hours: Where Does Your Time Go?)</p>

<p>including action triggers & habits for success in college.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will identify where their time is being spent and create an action plan to incorporate their academic and personal lives. 		
<p>Session #6 “Enhancing your Communication and Listening Skills” <i>(Invited Guest Speaker)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to respond vs. listening to react • Participants will learn the difference between communication and listening skills that will enhance their mentor/mentee relationships via role playing • Participants will create an assessment of their communication style to better understand different styles of communication. • Participants will engage in a self-reflection activity to understand how to communicate with mentees. 	<p>How does effective communication and listening look like in your mentoring relationship?</p> <p>What is your communication style?</p> <p>Are you practicing Mindful Listening with your mentee?</p>	<p>1. Reflection and group dialogue</p> <p>2. On flashcards, write about a mentoring situation/concern</p> <p>3. In pairs, mentors will gather solutions and strategies learned in this session, to help solve teammates’ mentoring situation/concern</p>
<p>Session #7 “Crafting a New Story” <i>(Invited Guest Speaker)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will engage in creating awareness of their life 	<p>Who are you?</p> <p>What or who brought you here today?</p>	<p>1. Reflection: <i>What are things that stop you from being your best self?</i></p>

<p>stories and use their stories as a way of self-advocacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will understand the framework of intersectionality and its importance to student identity development. • Participants will dialogue about the concept of imposter syndrome and how to actively practices strategies to overcome imposter syndrome in their personal and academic lives. • Participants will create a self-care plan to identify resources that can be accessed in times of high stress. • Participants will be able to create short-term vision plans that can continue to nourish their dreams and aspirations. 	<p>What does your identity (identities) mean to you?</p> <p>How does your identity (identities) shape your story?</p> <p>What are self-care strategies that have worked well for you?</p> <p>What are 5 strategies that help you and your mentee defeat the imposter syndrome?</p> <p>What do you envision for yourself in the next 3 months?</p>	<p>2.Create a self-care plan; strategies learned will later be shared with their mentees</p>
<p>Session #8 “Closing the Mentoring Relationship” Facilitator: Sandy Chávez</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will use self-reflection to analyze their experiences with their mentees throughout the academic year. • Identify ways the relationship has contributed to the 	<p>As you reflect, what could have you done differently as a peer mentor?</p> <p>What are steps that you took that worked well for you and your mentee?</p> <p>What are three significant learnings you took away from this mentoring experience?</p> <p>What did you learn from your mentee?</p>	<p>1.Reflection 2.Group dialogue 3.In groups of three, mentors will engage in role playing the last mentoring session and implement strategies they learned in this session</p>

<p>growth of peer mentor and mentee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants will dialogue as a collective to provide feedback about mentor/mentee relationships and TPMM programming. • Participants will use role play to practice the last mentoring session to provide a formal closing for their mentees. • Participants will receive certificates of acknowledgements from the TPPM Program Coordinators; as well as a final check-in to ensure a smooth transition for mentor participants. 	<p>Will you continue with the mentoring relationship? If so, how will that look like?</p> <p>How will you continue to grow as a campus leader?</p>	
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APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR PEER MENTEES

Focus Group Preparation Points:

- Introduce purpose of research and facilitator
- Statement of informed consent
- Confidentiality and pseudonyms
- Overview of focus group “ground rules” and process
- Respond to any questions from participants
- Conversation will be recorded
- **NOTE: Facilitator will observe group dynamics, encourage full participation, build depth of understanding as needed, and bring clarity to the participant’s questions.**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide the e FYE Program at Queta College with important information about your experiences in the Peer Mentor Program. We are collecting data that will provide FYE with information about how the FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees’ academic and future goals. This focus group will last approximately 60 minutes.

Everything you discuss during this interview is confidential so please feel free to speak openly. However, please be advised that although as researchers we will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality.

{In other words, it’s our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure your responses in the focus are autonomous. Please keep in mind that it’s also your responsibility to not share with anyone, the details of what will be discussed during this focus group}

We would like to remind you all to respect the privacy of your fellow mentees and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. **If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please let us know now as we cannot allow you to further participate in this study.**

In order for us to accurately record our conversation, we would like to digitally record it so it can be transcribed later. The recording will not be shared with anyone else beyond us researchers, Ms. Sandy Chavez, and a transcription company. If there are times during the interview where you would like the recorder paused, please feel free to let us know and we will pause the recording. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

Questions for Peer Mentee Focus Group:

1. Introduction: Introduce yourself, year in school, and major.
2. Why you chose to participate in FYE’s Peer Mentor Program?
3. Did your Peer Mentor help you create a SMART goal?
 - a. Probe: If so, how did the SMART goal worksheet and your mentor help you create goals?
 - b. Probe: What was your experience in creating a SMART? Any part challenging/helpful? What did you learn going through this process? Do you have a better understanding of what a SMART goal is?
4. [Refer to the SMART goal sheet and give them a moment to review] Have any of your SMART goals changed from when you started the mentor program to today? If so, in what ways? If they have not, this is okay, too.

- a. Probe: What do you think caused these changes?
 - b. Probe: Why do you think your SMART goals did not change?
- 5. Do you think you have learned from your peer mentor in relation to your classes (academics)?
 - a. Probe: If so, can you tell me more about why these are important?
 - b. Probe: How have you applied what you have learned from your peer mentor in the fall semester or plan to apply it in the Spring semester?
 - c. Probe: What do you see yourself thinking/feeling/doing that is different? (Idea: How have you evolved?)
- 6. Do you think you have learned from your peer mentor in relation to your personal goals?
 - a. Probe: If so, can you tell me more about why these are important?
 - b. Probe: How have you applied what you have learned from your peer mentor in the fall semester or plan to apply it in the Spring semester?
 - c. Probe: What do you see yourself thinking/feeling/doing that is different?
- 7. Do you think you have learned from your peer mentor in relation to your personal future goals?
 - a. Probe: If so, can you tell me more about why these are important?
 - b. Probe: How have you applied what you have learned from your peer mentor in the fall semester or plan to apply it in the Spring semester?
 - c. Probe: What do you see yourself thinking/feeling/doing that is different?
- 8. If you had to highlight one significant outcome [biggest thing you gained] from being a mentee, what would it be?
 - a. Probe: Why do you think?
- 9. Has your involvement in the Peer Mentor Program shaped (changed) your experience at Queta College?
 - a. Probe: If so, can you tell me more about this?
 - b. Probe: If not, why do you think?
- 10. Concluding Question: How can the FYE staff improve the Peer Mentor Program?
 - a. Probe: Is there anything you would like to add about your peer mentoring experience?

APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR PEER MENTORS

Focus Group Preparation Points:

- Introduce purpose of research and facilitator
- Statement of informed consent
- Confidentiality and pseudonyms
- Overview of focus group “ground rules” and process
- Respond to any questions from participants
- Conversation will be recorded
- **NOTE: Facilitator will observe group dynamics, encourage full participation, build depth of understanding as needed, and bring clarity to the participant’s questions.**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide the FYE Program at Queta College with important information about your experiences in the Peer Mentor Program. We are collecting data that will provide FYE with information about how the FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees’ academic and future goals. This focus group will last approximately 60 minutes.

Everything you discuss during this interview is confidential so please feel free to speak openly. However, please be advised that although as researchers we will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality.

{In other words, it’s our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure your responses in the focus are autonomous. Please keep in mind that it’s also your responsibility to not share with anyone, the details of what will be discussed during this focus group}

We would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow peer mentors and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. **If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please let us know now as you are not ineligible to participate in this study.**

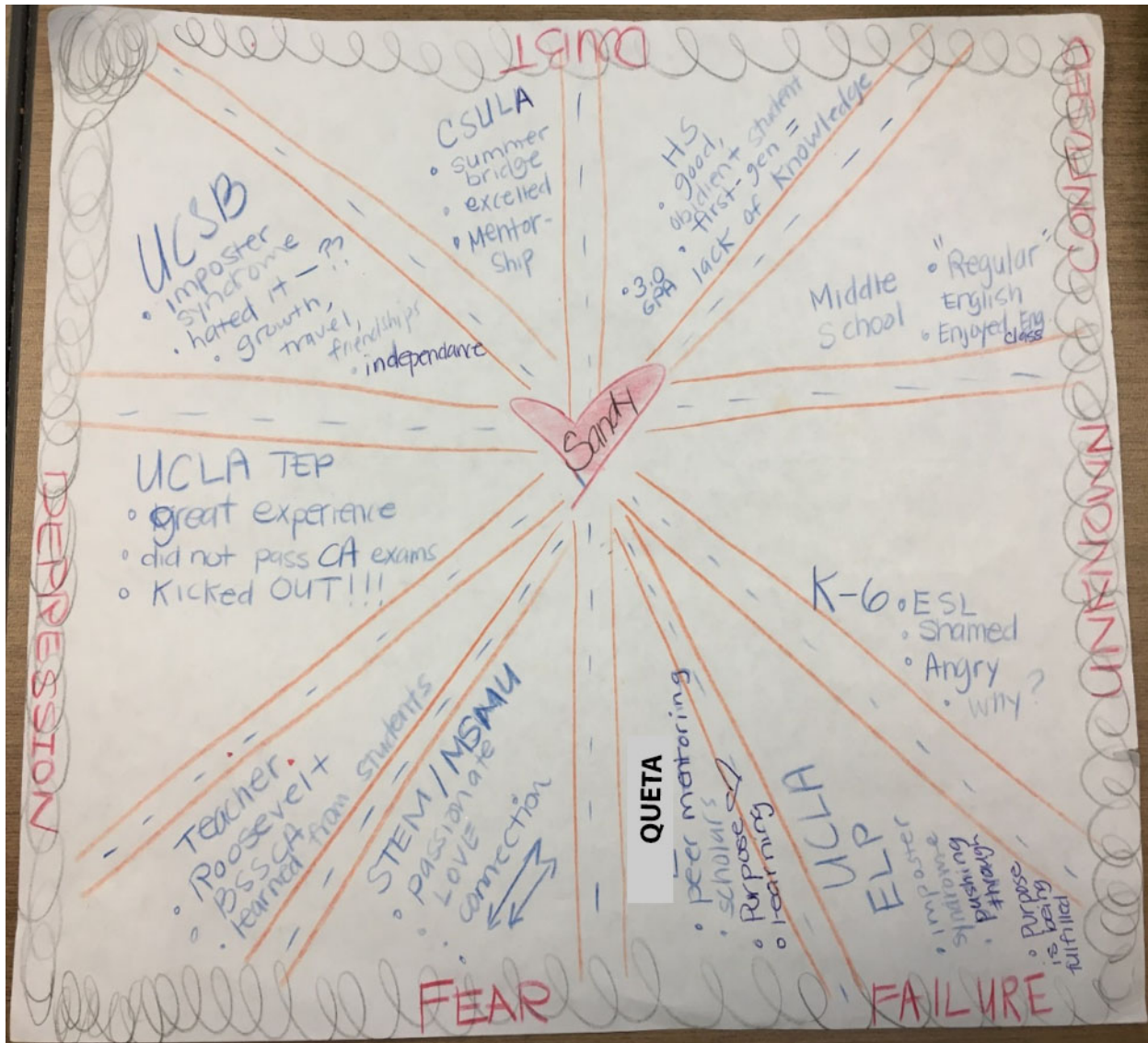
In order for us to accurately record our conversation, we would like to digitally record it so it can be transcribed later. The recording will not be shared with anyone else beyond us researchers, Ms. Sandy Chavez, and a transcription company. If there are times during the interview where you would like the recorder paused, please feel free to let us know and we will pause the recording. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

Questions for Peer Mentor Focus Group:

1. Introduction: Introduce yourself, year in school, major, and why you chose to participate in FYE’s Peer Mentor Program.
 - Probe: What interested you to participate as a peer mentor in the FYE Mentor Program?
2. Do you use what you have learned so far in the mentor trainings and check-in meetings in reaching your academic goals?
 - Probe: Is being an FYE Peer Mentor helping you reach your educational goal? If so, can you describe an example or two?
 - Probe: If not, why do you think?

3. Do you use what you have learned so far in the mentor trainings and check-in meetings in reaching your personal goals?
 - Probe: If so, can you describe an example or two?
 - Probe: If not, why do you think?
4. Do you use what you have learned so far in the mentor trainings and check-in meetings in reaching your future professional goals?
 - Probe: If so, can you describe an example or two?
 - Probe: If not, what can FYE do to help you in the Spring 2019 semester?
5. If you were to pick one significant result from being a peer mentor, what would it be?
 - Probe: Why do you think this is important?
6. As you are working with your mentees, what do you think is the most important aspect of creating a SMART goal together?
 - Probe: Why is this important to you?
7. I know you created an educational road map during training, how was that experience for you?
 - Probe: Did creating your road map help you visualize achieving your future educational and/or professional goals?
 - Probe: If so, how did it help you?
 - Probe: If not, why do you think?
8. Concluding Question: How can the FYE staff improve the Peer Mentor Program?
 - Probe: Is there anything you would like to add about your peer mentoring experience?

APPENDIX K: SANDY CHAVEZ'S EDUCATIONAL ROAD MAP



NOTE: I presented my Educational Road Map to peer mentors during TPMM training. However, peer mentors were encouraged to be creative and they created versions of own their maps. In addition, peer mentors were encouraged to do this reflective activity with their mentees as form counterstorytelling.

APPENDIX L: SMART GOAL WORKSHEET

SMART Goal Worksheet

S.M.A.R.T.	Questions...
Specific	Does your goal clearly and specifically state what you are trying to achieve? <i>If your goal is particularly large or lofty, try breaking it down into smaller, specific SMART goals.</i>
Measurable	How will you (and others) know if progress is being made on achieving your goal? Can you quantify or put numbers to your outcome?
Attainable	Is achieving your goal dependent on anyone else? Is it possible to reframe your goal so it only depends on you and not others? What factors may prevent you from accomplishing your goal?
Relevant	Why is achieving this goal important to you? What values in your life does this goal reflect? What effect will achieving your goal have on your life or on others?
Time-bound	When will you reach your goal? <i>Again, if your goal is particularly large, try breaking it down into smaller goals with appropriate incremental deadlines.</i>

Today's Date: _____

Date by which you plan to achieve your goal: _____

What is your goal in one sentence? (What's the bottom line?)

The benefits of achieving this goal will be...

Verify that your goal is S.M.A.R.T.

Specific: *What exactly will you accomplish?*

Measurable: *How will you (and others) know when you have reached your goal?*

Attainable: Is attaining this goal realistic with effort and commitment? Do you have the resources to achieve this goal? If not, how will you get them?

Relevant: Why is this goal important to you? Hone in on why it matters.

Time-bound: When will you achieve this goal?

ACTION PLAN		
What specific steps must you take to achieve your goal?		
<i>This action plan may just get you started. Feel free to create a more detailed step-by-step plan.</i>		
Task / to-do item	Expected completion date	Date actually completed

OBSTACLES / CHALLENGES	
What obstacles stand in the way of you achieving your goal?	
Obstacle	How will you address the challenges if/when they arise?

APPENDIX M: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PEER MENTORS

What is the impact of Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) on Latinx Community College Students?

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide the FYE Program at Queta College with important information about your experiences in the Peer Mentor Program. I am a UCLA doctoral student and I am collecting data that will provide FYE with information about how the Queta College's FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees' academic and future goals.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like the recorder off, please feel free to tell me so I can turn off the recording. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

College Aspirations and Expectations:

1. When did you realize that you wanted to attend college?
2. When you were growing up, were you encouraged or expected to attend college after high school?
3. Who has been in your support systems that has been motivating you to complete your educational goal here? (You do not have to state their names, if you do not feel comfortable. You can only state their role e.g., my sister.) If no one, it is okay.
4. How does your family motivate you to complete your educational goals? If they do not, it is okay. **(Don't ask this question if they mention family member in question #3)**

Barriers:

5. Have you ever felt discouraged not to pursue college education due to your race/ethnicity? If so, how did this have an impact on your student identity?
6. Have you experienced school-related challenges during your time as a Queta student? If so, what are these challenges and do have you overcome these challenges?
7. Have you encountered personal challenges (not school-related) during your time as a Queta student? If so, what are these challenges and how did you overcome these challenges?

8. How do you think the challenges you have mentioned have motivated you to continue and complete your educational goal? (**Ask this if they stated challenges above**)
9. How, if at all, have you used your Community Cultural Wealth to help you towards completion of your educational goal?
 - a. Do you feel that this/these capital has contributed to your success at Queta?

Experiences in TPPM:

10. How has participating as a peer mentor for FYE motivated you to complete your educational goal? If it has not, it is okay.
 - a. Do you feel that the CCW you just mentioned has contributed to your success as a peer mentor?
11. How do you intend to use the peer mentor training knowledge in your future educational and/or occupational aspirations?
 - a. Please provide example(s). If you cannot think how, it is okay.
12. Did you know you possessed CCW before participating in the FYE peer mentor program? If so, how so?
13. How many mentees do you currently have?
 - a. Do you feel that your mentee(s) is effectively utilizing you as a peer mentor? If so, can you tell me at least one way? If not, why do you think?
14. As of today, how many times have you met with your mentee(s)?
 - a. Roughly, how long are your meetings?
 - b. Are your meeting on/off campus?
15. In what way(s) do you think your assigned peer mentee(s) benefits from your mentoring relationship? If you do not think they do, why so?
16. What have you learned about yourself as a result of the mentor program?
17. How does the FYE Peer Mentor program help you with your academic success this semester? If not, why do you think so?

Recommendations:

18. Do you have any suggestions for ways to strengthen the peer mentor component?

APPENDIX N: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PEER MENTEES

What is the impact of Transformative Peer Mentor Model (TPMM) on Latinx Community College Students?

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide the FYE Program at Queta College with important information about your experiences in the Peer Mentor Program. I am a UCLA doctoral student and I am collecting data that will provide FYE with information about how the Queta College's FYE Peer Mentor Program may have an impact on peer mentors and mentees' academic and future goals.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like the recorder off, please feel free to tell me so I can turn off the recording. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

College Aspirations and Expectations:

1. When did you realize that you wanted to attend college?
2. When you were growing up, were you encouraged or expected to attend college after high school?
3. Who has been in your support systems that has been motivating you to complete your educational goal? (you do not have to state their names, if you do not feel comfortable. You can only state their role e.g. my sister). If no one, it is okay.
4. How does your family motivate you to complete your educational goals? If they do not, it is okay. **(Don't ask this question if they mention family member in question #3)**

Barriers:

5. Have you ever felt discouraged not to pursue college education due to your race/ethnicity? If so, how did this have an impact on your student identity?
6. Have you experienced school-related challenges during your time as a Queta student? If so, what are these challenges and do have you overcome these challenges?
7. Have you encountered personal challenges (not school-related) during your time as a Queta student? If so, what are these challenges and how did you overcome these challenges?

8. How do you think the challenges you have mentioned have motivated you to continue and complete your educational goal? **(Ask only this if they stated challenges above)**

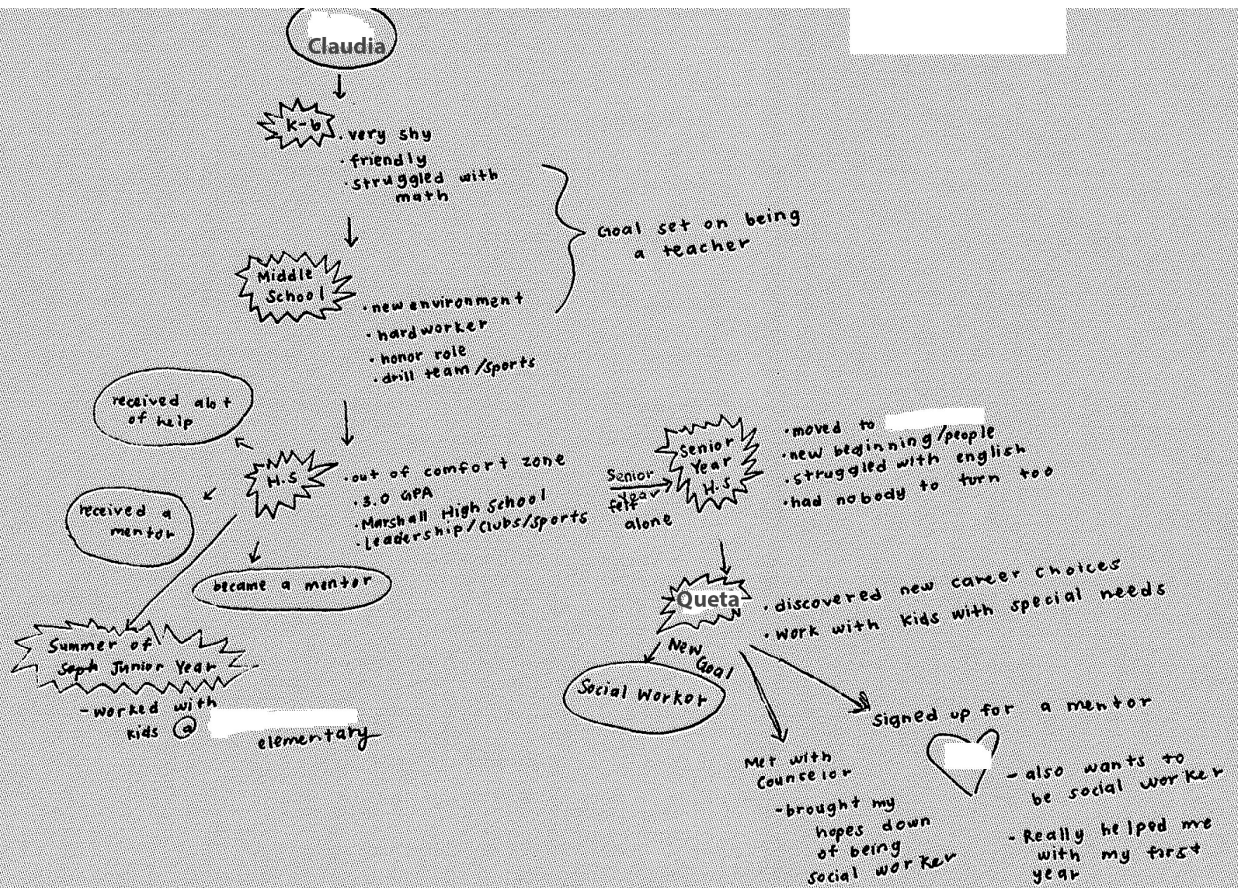
Experience in TPMM:

9. Have you been mentored before? If yes, by whom?
10. Has participating as a peer mentee within FYE motivated you to complete your educational goal? How so? If you do not think so, it is okay.
11. What is at least one way your peer mentor helped you be successful you this semester? If you cannot think of one, it is okay.
12. What have you learned from your peer mentor?
- a. And how will you apply this (knowledge) in your future aspirations? Can you please provide me an example(s). If you cannot think of one, it is okay.
13. Do you feel supported by your peer mentor? If so, how? If not, why do you think so?
14. Do you feel comfortable sharing your ideas or asking your mentor for help during your mentor meetings? If not, why do you think?
15. As of today, how many times have you met with your peer mentor?
- a. Roughly, how long are your meetings?
 - b. Are your meeting on/off campus?
16. In what way(s) do you think your assigned peer mentor benefits from your mentoring relationship? If you do not think they do, why so?
17. What have you learned about yourself as a result of the mentor program?

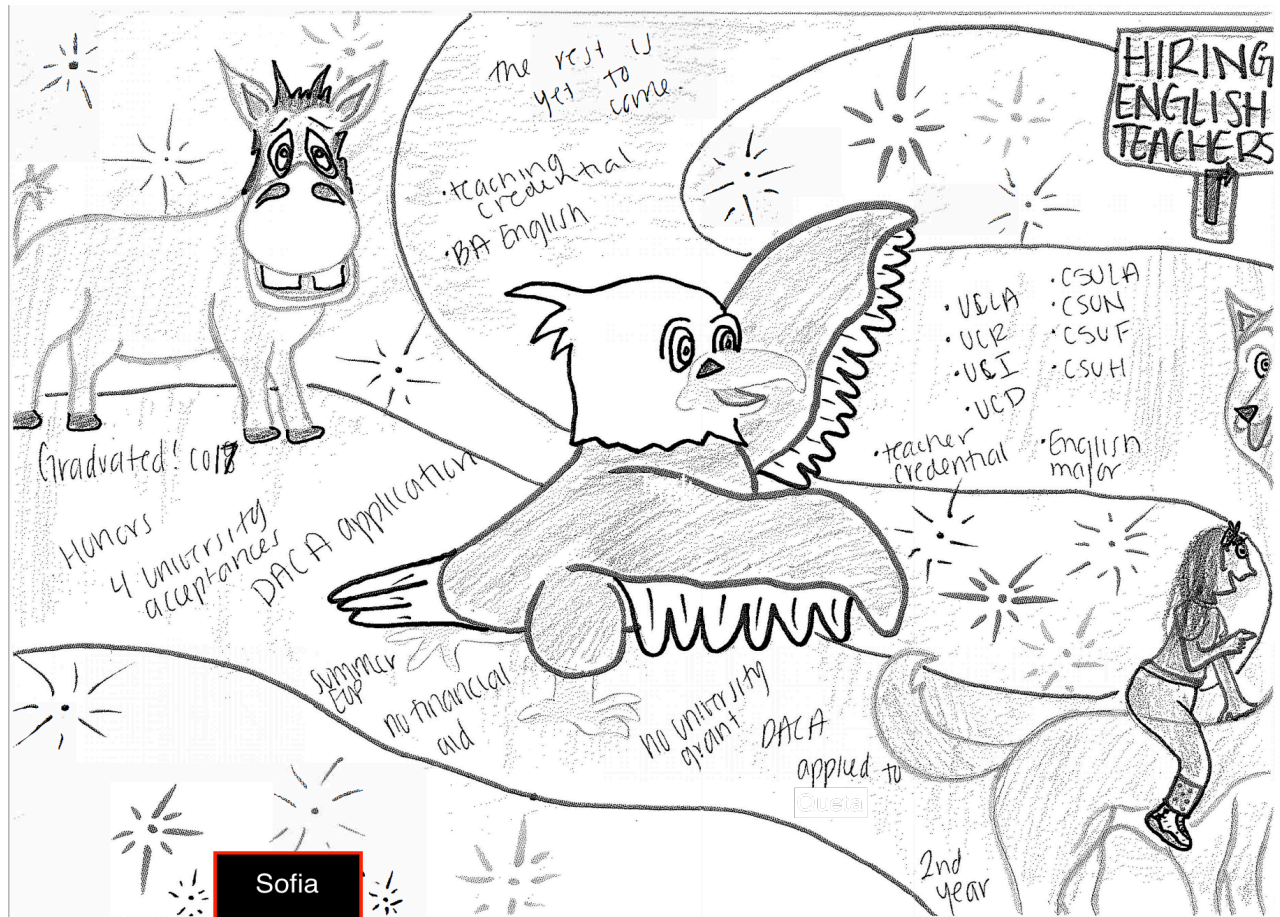
Recommendations:

18. Do you have any suggestions for ways to strengthen the peer mentor component?

APPENDIX O: CLAUDIA'S EDUCATIONAL ROAD MAP



APPENDIX P: SOFIA'S EDUCATIONAL ROAD MAP



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